

aphra

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FREE
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STAFF

EDITOR: Elizabeth Fisher

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Gerry Sachs

PUBLIC RELATIONS: Jacqueline Ceballos

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"But What Have You Done For Me Lately" © copyright 1969 by Myrna Lamb, in an earlier form, as an unpublished play.

PREAMBLE TO APHRA*

Tired of Bellowing and Rothing, Maïlering and Malamuding, we looked around at the current literary scene and decided that, for whatever reasons of history and economics, it is still, or perhaps more than ever, dominated by the Judeo-Christian patriarchal ethos. Women have more to give the world than babies. Whole areas of life, of consciousness and feeling are crying for recording and interpretation from within. Too long have women been seen from outside and from afar. Too long have we been brainwashed with male stereotypes of what they are like and what we are like. The view from the bottom may not be wide, but it is deep and upward, and for centuries women have had unique opportunities for practicing observation.

Works of art are bigger than theses, subject to multiple planes of interpretation. We propose a magazine that will give outlet to the feminine consciousness, a magazine free of ulterior motives, interested only in giving women a chance to express themselves and to see themselves. In these days of artistic confusion when the words avant-garde and arriere-garde have lost meaning, leaving fashion as the dominator, we shall seek work that will speak to women on an esthetic level. We submit that one reason for the form of the current upsurge in feminism — the rap session, the group meeting with individuals bearing witness, the opportunity for community and identification — is that the

*Named in honor of Aphra Behn (1640-1689), the first woman known to have earned her living by writing, i.e., the first woman professional writer.

mass media provide such biased and commercially oriented material. The literary and entertainment scene are dominated by male stereotypes, male fantasies, male wish fulfillment, a male power structure. In consequence women have begun spontaneously to band together and create their own consciousness. Groups have been springing up all over the country, multiplying by division. This is all well and good, but there is a need for a less evanescent form of expression. We shall meet on paper, offering work in which women can see themselves, offering them the identification and shock of recognition which art traditionally gives, but which is clearly underexpressed in the current scene — be it book publishing, television, theatre, magazine or film.

The idea then is to encourage women as women, not in terms of male syndromes nor with preconceptions imposed from outside, whether by Freud or Madison Avenue market researchers. If we have a special bias for women it is because they need it: they have been getting a raw deal for centuries, and the reform movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has suffered from the backlash of the forties and fifties. The emphasis will be on art, not ideology. We shall publish what we like and what we respond to, with the idea that we shall be speaking directly to women so that they can say "There am I" and feel stronger and more doing.

FRIENDS

Any project that encourages woman to break away from her subculture is the very nearest thing to my heart. I wish you support from any radical forces you can muster in what must be a formidable task in your hostile environment.

JANE ARDEN

Your editorial has all my sympathy. I wish you good luck. With my best sentiments.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

It is always good to meet a new magazine dedicated to vitality, imagination, and reason.

GWENDOLYN BROOKS

Portnoy is a dog, and women are his vomit. But what if the vomit begins to bark too? Even the dog must be intrigued, instructed. It's high time for two sounds where there was one before, for dog and other stories. APHRA, expound the Other!

MARY ELLMANN

If the magazine APHRA lives up to its stated aims, it will have been long overdue and much needed.

As one who has battled long and (I am often tempted to think) fruitlessly

against the stereotypes that still encumber the development of women as human beings, I wish you all success; and that includes an audience of men as well as women.

MARYA MANNES

What we owe men is some freedom from their part in a murderous game in which they kick each other to death with one foot, bracing themselves on our various comfortable places with the other. More to come.

GRACE PALEY

I like your opening editorial very much. As long as it can be said about a woman writer, "She writes like a man" and that woman takes it as a compliment, we are in trouble.

ANNE SEXTON

I'm with you wholeheartedly.

MAY SWENSON

THE KITCHEN MAID

— HELEN NEVILLE

Mr. Babcock was so tall, so clean-looking, so beautifully dressed in his stiff white shirt and long black swallowtail coat, so exactly what a butler should be, that as she followed him down the narrow flight of stairs to the kitchen Elly could feel herself growing smaller and smaller, and when she opened her mouth to mumble a reply to one of his long admonitory sentences, was surprised that any sound came out at all.

And when they paused before the big kitchen door, the three sharp raps Mr. Babcock gave it seemed to her to echo the quickened beating of her heart. For although it was nothing new for her to be standing beside a butler before a kitchen door (in the last ten years she had worked in six houses), each time it happened she felt as frightened and lost as on that morning, all of ten years ago, when she had stood before another door beside another tall, beautifully dressed gentleman, and wondered what might be in store for her.

"What in bloody 'ell's the matter?" Mr. Babcock demanded, a minute or two having passed without any answer to his rapping; he rapped again, more loudly; and presently there was the sound of footsteps, and the door flew open on a handsome dark-haired young man wearing a grease-stained black apron over a frilled white shirt the sleeves of which were rolled above his elbows. At first, in the hall's half-darkness seeing nobody but Elly, he frowned inquiringly;

but when he caught sight of Mr. Babcock behind her, his face expanded in a respectful grin.

"Yer hears want cleanin', m' boy," Mr. Babcock said. "I been a-bangin' of this door it must've been twenty toimes."

"Beggin' yer parding, sir," the young man said, the grin on his face dying into a look of anxious apology, "I was out in the stybles a-cleanin' of the 'arness, an' never 'eerd yer until this very minute when I come in."

"Well, well, let's get on with it," Mr. Babcock said, apparently satisfied with this explanation. "This 'ere's Helly, the noo kitching myde. Nah then, wyke up!" he added, giving her a smart poke between the shoulder blades; for in a manner of speaking she had been asleep. "This 'ere's John the footman," Mr. Babcock went on, "'e 'as an eye, 'e 'as, fer the lydies—so moind yer look out!" And at this both men roared with laughter, the point of which Elly could see; for she knew as well as they did how little she had to "look out" for any man. With her sad brown eyes, her stringy black hair, her pock-marked face and shapeless little body, she could scarcely be called a temptation: in all her life, there had never been a young man to take notice of her in any special sort of way.

"Tyke her inter Cook," Mr. Babcock said. "I'll be leavin' yer now, I'm doo upstairs. 'Er Lydyship 'as got a man from the kyterer's fer tonought's party, an' she 'as requested me to show 'im what's what. An' remember, there's seventy-foive guests expected, so moind yer all on yer toes. That goes fer you too, Miss—look sharp!"

"Come along," John said, after Mr. Babcock had left them; and she followed him through the big dark kitchen, with its smell of food and spices, that was so much like all the other kitchens she had ever worked in, pausing with him by the stove before which a very small, very fat woman, her back toward them, was stirring something in a big iron pot. And although she must have heard their footsteps, and been aware that they were standing behind her, it was some minutes before she turned to face them, her steaming ladle in her hand.

"It's the noo kitching myde, Mrs. Jennings, marm—Helly, she says 'er nyme is," John said—as if, it struck Elly, he weren't at all sure of her right to be called

by it; but Mrs. Jennings took her time about responding to this introduction, too. Her face was so round and fat and ruddy it might have come, Elly thought, straight out of the oven; and her little black eyes were for all the world like the raisins cooks stuff into a roast. These eyes now regarded her in the kind of scrutiny which, accustomed though she was to it from cooks, never failed to ruffle her, and she kept her own gaze on the floor in her dread of meeting the searching, hard malevolence in those tiny eyes.

"Thankye, John," Mrs. Jennings said at last, in a tone so pleasant it didn't seem to belong to anybody who could stare so; but when she spoke to Elly after John had gone back to the stables it was as she might have been expected to speak.

"Yer can wash up them luncheon dishes," she said, pointing to a pile of dishes on a small table on the other side of the room. "Them's the 'elp's dishes, but moind yer get 'em as bright an' shinin' as if they belonged to 'Er Lydyship 'erself. An' how in the nyme of God d'yer expeck ter wash dishes without any water, I should loike ter know?" she demanded, for Elly, in her haste to get to the dishes, had forgotten the steaming kettle on the stove. "O God," she prayed as she lifted it, "please let me give satisfaction in this 'ouse, please don't let me do no wool-gatherin' 'ere fer Jesus Christ sykes y-men."

But when she stood over the basin of hot water sloshing around in it a bar of soap in a wire cage that gave it the look of sea water, she couldn't help thinking of Bournemouth, and a summer she had spent there many years ago. The family she worked for had had a summer home in Bournemouth; it had been her first sight of the sea. She had nearly got the sack on account of it, for unfortunately the kitchen window had been directly over the big wonderful thing that was forever dashing itself against the yellow beach the house stood so close to; and it had seemed to Elly the body didn't live who could have helped running over every now and then to have a look at it, no matter what had to be done. In many ways, that summer in Bournemouth was the most unpleasant she had ever known: the family was the second one she had worked for, and she learned so slowly she was as green as on her first day in service; and the sea being always there for her to look at only made things worse. The cook was an old woman

who in spite of her age was better at her work than the youngest and quickest among them, and had a sharper eye for other people's mistakes; from morning till night she found fault with her, until the whole kitchen, following Cook's lead, seemed to have nothing better to do than complain of the mistakes Elly was guilty of, or nag at her for being slow. And there was that morning when, finding out she had forgotten the night before to wash the pots and pans and hang them back in their places, Cook had boxed her ears with such fury that she had expected to be killed. Yet, strange to say, whenever she saw anything—such as this bubbly water in the basin—that reminded her of Bournemouth, it was as if that ugly time had never been: she could think only of the sea dashing itself over and over against the beach where except when the tide was high it never stayed longer than a split second; and always making her feel that there was something restless and unhappy, something almost human, inside it, trying over and over to free itself from whatever it was that held it, and unable to find a place for itself anywhere else.

"Wot in blyzes is the matter with yer?" Cook's voice sounded in her ear, for Cook herself was close behind her, her little red face puckered with a rage that was making it redder still. "I been watchin' yer standin' 'ere fer the larst foive minutes without movin' loike yer was myde of stone! Are yer sick, m'ybe? Are yer cryzy in the 'ead?" Grabbing Elly's arm she shook it as if to waken her, while her tiny black eyes, in which there was as much honest perplexity as anger, searched Elly's face. "Moonin' an' mopin' on a d'y loike terd'y of all d'ys, with the party comin' an' all of us 'avin' ter work ontill we drop! Nah yer listen ter me, yer slut: if I catch yer oncet more standin' 'ere doin' nothink with a silly look on yer fyce loike yer was barmy, so 'elp me God I'm goin' strypte upstairs ter Mr. Babcock ter arsk 'im ter get somebody else!"

"O please, God, myke me work proper," Elly prayed, alarmed no more by Mrs. Jennings' final declaration than by anything that had preceded it, for although she had listened to plenty of such tirades, from cooks especially, she never seemed to get used to them; and now a familiar sick feeling filled her stomach, as hot tears crowded her eyes. But, brushing them away and wiping her nose on the back of her hand, she tried to forget how sick she felt—tried,

as she rubbed one greasy plate after another, to banish from her mind every thought, feeling or memory that had nothing to do with her task. She worked indeed at such a pitch of concentration that in less than half an hour every dish was washed, dried and stacked in the cupboard, the silver laid away in its drawer, the basin emptied into the pail for used water, and the towel and dishcloth hung on their racks to dry. Then Cook sent her down to the storeroom for a basket of potatoes that had to be peeled for the party; but when she sat with her paring knife on a high stool over the table where she had washed the dishes, the basket on one side of her and a big empty iron pot on the other, she felt more miserable even than before. For of all the things she had to do, peeling potatoes had always seemed to her by far the worst of them: the fact that it was simpler than washing dishes or cooking a meal or sweeping a room out, that there weren't a lot of other things to be done in connection with it but only the one thing over and over, was what made it to her mind so hateful. There seemed to be nearly a hundred potatoes in the basket, and as she drew out the first, such a feeling of wretchedness and even fright came over her that she did not know how she would ever get through the lot.

But when she had started on her tenth, or possibly eleventh, potato, she was conscious of a certain pleasure as she watched its hard moist flesh emerging under her knife from the ribbon of brown skin spiraling slowly downward; and when the final white thing, stripped entirely (for she had been especially careful), lay in her hands, it seemed different from any potato she had ever seen. For, in general, even pared they were ugly things, but this one was lovely—white and round like an egg yet with a lot of sharp little angles left by her knife all over it, that for some reason seemed to make it lovelier still. But as she sat there admiring her handiwork, turning it this way and that in her rough red fingers, it was suddenly snatched out of them, as Cook's voice again sounded in her ears.

"God an' the s'ynts!" Cook screamed, her little puckered face so close to Elly's that in backing away from it Elly nearly fell off the stool. "Wot in God's nyme is wrong with yer? Sittin' 'ere loike a bloomin' idjit starin' at a pertyter in the toime it'd tyke anybody else ter skin the lot! No wonder yer done so few of 'em—" she rattled the pot wrathfully in proof of her accusation. "Nah listen, yer bloody trash, I 'ave got my own work ter do, I 'ave, an' I carn't be expected

ter come runnin' over 'ere every blarsted minute ter see 'ow you're doin' yours. Yer fill this pot an' yer fill it quick, or I'll tear yer black 'eart out!"

Too terrified to give a thought to the monotony of her task, or to anything but what her task required of her, Elly skinned potato after potato, not daring to pause even to straighten her back and neck when they began aching intolerably. At last she had a full pot to show for her efforts, which she bore, her heart thumping, over to Cook's table by the stove. "Let's see 'em," the little woman demanded, taking one after another out of the pot and turning it around in her stubby fingers: soon a little pile lay on the table between them, and as Elly stared at it the sick feeling came back to her, for every potato in it was flecked all over with bits of skin that in her haste she had failed to notice, and smudged besides from her fingers in their contact with the dirty surfaces she had forgotten to wash. There was a long silence during which Mrs. Jennings stood there perfectly still looking at her as she could look, and Elly was prepared for anything she might say or do to her; but at the end of it the little woman simply sank her small bulk into a rocking chair between the stove and the table, her arms extended in a limp gesture of helplessness, as tears of exasperation filled her eyes. "I don't know wot I done ter deserve it!" she wailed—and at this spectacle of grief where she had never thought to find it, Elly was filled with such remorse and pity that she began dropping the flawed potatoes back into the pot, intending to do them over; and she would have done so had not Cook, leaping with sudden vehemence out of the rocker, slapped her hands, and with all the strength of her fat little body shoved her a good two feet out of the way. "Don't yer dare touch a single one of 'em!" she shrieked. "I'll do 'em myself. I y-n't got nothinkk else ter do terd'y—oh dear, no, yer Lydyship, not a blessed thing!—I can do your work too. I'd loike ter know what pertickler street it was Mr. Babcock picked yer up hoff of—I would indeed!" Muttering, sobbing, cursing, she attacked one potato after another, those in the pot as well as those in the pile before her, with a competence unaffected by her wrath or her speed, pausing only to order Elly to sweep the floor up—"If," she added dubiously, "yer've ever l'arned 'ow to 'old a broom!"

Ah, would nothing change her? Elly wondered as she drove the broom this way and that over the floor and in and out of corners and under the tables and

the chairs. Would none of the prayers she said nor the blows she received nor the things that were said to her make her like other people, able to keep her mind on her work and do it as she was meant to? For even when she kept her mind on it, it didn't seem to help any: the work might go quicker, but always there was something she had done wrong, or left undone. "O God," she prayed, "please myke me different"; and this time God must have heard her, for it wasn't long before the floor was spotless except for a neat little pile of dust in the center that reminded her of a picture of a mountain she had seen once—but she grimly set her mind against this fancy as she ran to the closet for a dustpan and brush to take it up.

When she had emptied the pan into a trash bucket, Cook called to her to get the help's tea, for it was after five already, and while she was standing over the stove frying kidneys and bacon they all began coming in: John, the young footman, wearing a pearl-gray waistcoat instead of an apron over his frilled white shirt; an older man dressed exactly like him whom they called Martin and who she guessed was the coachman; a woman with a weatherbeaten brown face and frizzed hair who because of her black satin uniform and lace cap and apron, and because she was called by her surname Bolton, but more particularly because of the respect the others showed her, she took to be her Ladyship's maid; and two girls who she could tell by their blue cotton uniforms and plain starched caps and aprons were parlormaid. One of these, whom Cook greeted as Maud, was very homely-looking, with a sharp-featured freckled face and masses of straw-colored hair; but the other, Josie—a North Country lass, to judge by her speech and her red cheeks and black hair and flashing eyes—was one of the prettiest girls Elly had ever seen. Just to look at her made her feel happy; and when she saw the look in John's eyes as he spoke to Josie, she was happier still. Soon she was so caught up in the effort of imagining what the two of them might say if they were alone together that it took an angry sizzle from the stove and a smell of burning to recall her to her surroundings; and just in time she lifted the pan and shook it, before any harm was done.

Last of all came Mr. Babcock, and Elly's sense of his importance increased when she saw how the rest of them, even Cook, stood waiting round the big center table before their places—the men on one side, the women on the other,

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except for Cook at one end facing him—until he sat down. And it seemed to her he kept them waiting just a minute or two longer than was necessary—just as Cook, when John introduced them, had stood eyeing her for a full minute before opening her mouth. There was no place for her at the table, which didn't surprise her, for in none of the houses she had ever worked in had she been permitted to eat with the other help. But at the sight and smell of the food before her a big dark hole seemed to open up right in the middle of her stomach, and she remembered what in the past few hours she had been too busy or too frightened to think about: that she had not had a thing to eat since six o'clock that morning when she had bought herself a cup of tea and a penny bun at a market stall. She knew she was supposed to get something for herself, as had been the case in every house she had ever worked in, and usually she managed to put aside some of the food on a plate and fill a cup with tea, setting both on a corner of the stove and eating and drinking where she stood. But on her first day in a new place she was always too shy to avail herself of this privilege, and now, as she portioned out the food for the others, left none for herself in the frying pan, preferring even the spreading emptiness inside her to the embarrassment of being seen by people whom she knew so little as she gave way to her need.

"Fer-wot-we-are-abah-ter-receive-we-give-Thee-thanks-O-Lord-y-men," Cook said, after Elly had set the cups of tea and plates of kidney and bacon before them. "I 'ope yer'll hall parding the tea, lydies an' gentlemen," she added. "We 'ave got a noo kitching myde with us, an' she y-n't quaiter roight in 'er 'ead." And since Cook was a power in the kitchen second only to Mr. Babcock, John said the tea tasted exactly like piss-water, and Martin gave it as his opinion that the kidneys wasn't fit to be throwed to pigs. And Maud, turning to Cook, said what a shyme it was Prue had left them, since she was such a sweet pretty girl as always fried the kidneys and bycon the way they should be done. But John argued that when it came to prettiness Prue couldn't have held a candle to Josie; whereupon Josie, squealing happily, told him to get along. Soon the whole table was laughing and talking—with the exception only of Bolton, whose pursed lips in her homely brown face and whose eyes that stared rigidly over their heads without lowering even to the cup of tea she blew on gently every now and then

to cool it, or to the morsels of food her knife bore daintily upward to her scarcely parted lips, seemed to be saying that she was here in this kitchen having her tea with the rest of them only because her Ladyship had asked it of her, but that she considered it a disgrace just the same. She didn't even turn her head when Mr. Babcock, frowning for order, began telling them about the party—what linens and silver were to be used on the table, what vintages of wine served, who some of the guests would be.

"I understand a Member of Parleymint is hexpected," he announced.

"Is 'e now?" Cook exclaimed, with such a beaming face and in a tone so pleasant and kindly that Elly could scarcely believe she was the same woman who had cursed and screamed at her, or had sat down before the faulty potatoes crying tears of helpless rage. "Well, I'm sure I can't think of a single 'ouse in all Hengland, Mr. Babcock, where 'e'd be better hentertyned!"

It was after he had finished eating that Elly saw how deserving Mr. Babcock was of the respect everybody had for him—except Bolton, of course, who probably considered nobody but the master and mistress worthy of her respect. For, after picking his teeth with a long-handled ivory toothpick, he leaned back in his chair, cleared his throat for silence, and taking a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles from one of his coat pockets and a folded newspaper from the other, adjusted the spectacles to his nose, unfolded the paper, and proceeded to read from it—as few of the people Elly had ever known aside from gentlefolk would have been able to do. He did not have to ask for silence; it was given to him, as it is given to ministers in chapels and churches, all heads but one being turned in his direction (for his accomplishment was something to see as well as listen to), although for some of them the meal was not quite over, and bits of kidney lay here and there on a plate or two, and more than a mouthful of tea stood cooling in some of the cups. Bolton alone seemed unimpressed: maintaining her posture of withdrawal that throughout the meal had never wavered, she seemed to be giving them all to understand that only the ladylike nature of her calling prevented her, since she had finished her tea, from excusing herself and going upstairs where she belonged.

"The Hire-ish Quest-chun," Mr. Babcock said, speaking very slowly and

enunciating every syllable. "Chewsd'y, Dee-cember Ee-lev-enth. In a spesh-ul sess-shun yes-ter-d'y harfternoon Mis-ter Glad-stone ad-dressed the 'Ouse on the sub-jick uv 'Ome Rool . . ."

Their minds stumbled after him over one strange many-syllabled word after another, as he gave them Mr. Gladstone's views on Irish Nationalism ("Them Hirish oughter be strung up, every blarsted one uv 'em," John declared stoutly), the Queen's plans for a quiet Christmas at Windsor ("Ah, the dear," Cook sighed), the sinking of a vessel with five nuns among the passengers in the North Sea ("Yer'd never get me inter one of them boats," Martin muttered), a woman found on a dark street in Aldgate, her throat slit from ear to ear. (Here Cook said she didn't know what the world was coming to, and Maud maintained the streets wasn't safe for a girl nowadays even in broad daylight, and Josie squealed with horror until John, with a loving look, assured her she had no call to be afearred of any street she might walk on, so long as she was walking on it with him.)

"Py-ann-er toon-er want-ed," Mr. Babcock went on, frowning for silence; for now he was up to the paid notices. "Ly-dy ter teach child-ren . . . 'Ouse fer syle . . . Steam-ship leav-in' Liv-er-pool fer North Am-er-i-ca . . . " ("That's where I'd loike ter be goin'," John said, but Martin muttered something about Indians, and Cook said that as for her, thank you very much, she would live and die in old Hengland where it had pleased the good Lord to place her.) . . . "Val-et want-ed fer gent-le-man leav-in' fer Heast In-jer . . . "

Oh, what was it like, Elly wondered, to be able to read? Like having wings growing out of your body? Like being able to see after a lifetime of blindness? Like finding a pile of money in the street—millions and millions of banknotes and pieces of silver that would take you anywheres, to America maybe, or Heast Injer, or into the midst of things that had never happened to you, and were never likely to happen, in all your days? And what seemed strangest of all to her was Mr. Babcock's own attitude toward his rare and precious gift: he seemed to take it so calmly, as ordinary people like herself took their sight or their hearing—never talking about it, nor even, so far as she could see, thinking about it, and only once a day, as now, showing it off. Whereas it seemed to her that if she could read, she would be worse than ever at all the work she had to do, would

be unable to wash a dish or peel a potato or sweep a floor or cook the simplest meal for thinking about the book she might be in the middle of, or a piece of news she might have come across in the paper; for wondering how she might feel on a dark street if a stranger with a lifted knife came up to her; or what had been the last wild prayers of those nuns on the doomed ship as they went into the icy waters; or what it was like to be the Queen. . . .

But Mr. Babcock was no different from the rest of them in having hours of work before him, and after folding his spectacles and newspaper and putting them back in their pockets, he pushed back his chair and standing up behind it reminded them of the event for which they had to look sharp and be on their toes. After he had gone there was a general scuffling of chairs, and soon the whole kitchen was empty except for herself and Cook. While she was washing the dishes she might have fancied herself alone entirely, for Cook had settled in the rocker for her afternoon nap, and the noise of her snoring filled the room. She was free now to think to her heart's content of the sea at Bournemouth, or John and Josie, or any of the happenings Mr. Babcock had been reading about; she could even have stood still for a few minutes before one of the windows looking out at the bare tree in the yard that she had seen earlier from an upstairs window and wonder what it might be like in the springtime when it came to life with green leaves and twittering birds. Yet she yielded to none of these temptations, being somehow more conscious than at any other time that day of the necessity—although there was nobody to watch her—of keeping on with her work; for in some way she couldn't have explained, and that seemed to have no sense to it—for there was nobody around to tell her, and no signs of it anywhere as yet—she knew the party was about to begin. She always knew; it was something they all knew, something you couldn't help knowing if you were one of those—even the least of those, as she was—on whom the course of a party, in all its twistings and turnings, depended; and for all her stupidity in other matters, it was after the very first one she had ever worked for that she had been able to tell the exact moment when the great wheel that was to whirl all those who clung to it faster and faster in its steady increase of tempo was being set in its course. She could feel it in her bones. She could feel, now, the whole house holding its breath.

And suddenly Cook, as if she too had been aware even in her sleep of the precise moment when the silence around her took on its threat of noise and impending frenzied activity, woke with a grunt and, rising immediately, opened the oven door to ascertain the progress of the great joints that had been browning for the last several hours in their pans. When she sent Elly down to the storeroom for a basket of apples to be peeled for the pudding, she made no mention of the luckless potatoes, nor did Elly, sitting over the apples with her paring knife, giving more time than was required of her to a single one. She was never to know whether they were done well or badly; for when she laid the filled pot on the table, Mrs. Jennings did no more than glance at it as she went on kneading a large mass of dough in a wooden bowl. There was as little time for scolding as for mistakes or dawdling: every moment became more and more crowded with work that had to be done faster and faster than before. Scarcely looking up, she sent Elly out to the yard for the water for the guests to wash in, for which Elly made three trips, carrying two pails at a time and emptying them successively into six great iron kettles on Cook's table, and setting these when they were full on the stove. When she was arranging her table for the evening with its basin and soaps and scouring knives and brushes, Mr. Babcock—more beautifully dressed than ever in white gloves, a lace stock, and puce-colored velvet waistcoat and breeches—came running into the room (he who was ordinarily so slow in his movements) and down the cellar steps, emerging, a minute or two later, with six bottles of wine with which he ran back through the kitchen and out the door. And while she stood at Cook's table slicing radishes and chopping heads of lettuce, Maud and Josie, in black satin uniforms and caps and aprons as fancy as Bolton's, came down for the kettles just beginning to steam that were needed for the pitchers in some of the bedrooms; and she knew the first guests had arrived.

And soon the great wheel began moving—slowly at first, then faster and faster, gaining force and speed with every turn. Standing over her basin, she worked as if flames were at her back threatening to devour her unless she kept always an inch or two abreast of them by driving her body through a wall of work that grew higher and thicker the faster she moved to it and the harder she drove. No matter how fiercely she labored, the mountains of heavy dinner

plates brought down to her from upstairs by John and Martin and the man from the caterer's increased in size instead of diminishing; whenever she was halfway through one pile, one or another of the men would come staggering toward her on the bandy legs his burden gave him, to set it down on the lowered pile which rose thereby even higher than before. She left her table only on matters of the sheerest necessity—when she had to empty her basin of its cooled and dirty water, or fetch fresh water from the yard for the kettles, or kettles for her basin from the stove. Sometimes in the course of these operations she got into Cook's way, and the little woman (without however deserting her own task for a moment) would storm at her in a fury more violent, it seemed to Elly, than anything she had had to endure for her graver offenses earlier that day. And always in her brief absences the mountains of plates on her table grew higher and more plentiful, so that when she returned, John and Martin and the new man, standing over it with their fresh loads for which there was no room, would call her a filthy whore and a trollop for holding back their work. She would have to transfer the plates on the table to the floor so as to make room for the new plates; and since this too took time, the men would repeat their epithets, adding a volley of threats of which John's to slit her up the belly was by no means the worst. She might have taken some comfort (could she have spared a moment for comfort) in the thought that they were all of them scarcely crosser with her than with each other: the kitchen resounded not only with the banging of doors and the clattering of dishes but with the oaths and names and threats that were tossed back and forth all over it—without however seeming to make the slightest impression on those for whom they were intended, who couldn't have spared the time it would have taken for blows or quarrels or tears. Once when John, racing empty-handed out of the kitchen, collided with Martin coming into it with his arms full, Martin, calling him a whoreson bastard, promised to beat the living filth out of him if it ever happened again—but John, on his way upstairs to the dining room, where he was to help with the service, raced on without turning his head. Cook's rages were by no means reserved for Elly: once when the new man about to carry one of the joints upstairs let fall a few drops of its juices onto the floor, the harassed little woman, raising her steaming ladle, threatened to smash his fyce with it if he didn't get to blyzes out of her way. Maud and Josie were continually shouting at each other, continually pushing

into each other as they dashed through the room with the pans of joint or partridge or fish or vegetables they were carrying upstairs to the pantry for the men to serve—as everybody else was continually shouting at and pushing into them. Even for John, Josie was no more than the obstacle they had all become for each other; and whenever by the sheerest accident—for she was as indifferent to him now as he was to her—she brushed against him, stepping into his path as he ran with a pile of clean plates from Elly's table, or shoving past him to the door he was on his way to with a pan of steaming fish, he forgot her glossy hair, her bold black eyes, her warm young body so close to him, as he shouted at her in the way he had been shouting at Elly and called her the same unforgivable names—to which she forbore to retaliate not only because there wasn't time to but because like him she felt nothing, knew nothing, was nothing but the work which, if they died at it, had to be done. They were like people drowning, fighting for their lives: in the whirlpool that consumed them there was room only for the breaths that enabled them to struggle in it until it ceased. And she was like the rest of them. The curses and threats and insults and tart commands of the men and women around her were so many words to her: whatever in the past had pleased or troubled her had lost its power to please or trouble her now. She had no thoughts, no feelings, no memories, no desires, no hopes. She was nobody: she was something that stood over a basin, scraping, washing, rinsing, drying, stacking; that ran through a room with hot kettles, or pumped water into a pail. . . .

At one point when a lock of her hair came loose from its comb and fell into her eyes she didn't dare comb it back but contented herself with blowing it up out of her eyes every now and then as she worked. And once after she had filled her basin and was sloshing around in it the bar of soap in its wire cage that filled it with bubbles, the temptation to think of the sea at Bournemouth was as powerful as another temptation that had begun to plague her—to lie down, just as she was, in the middle of the floor and go to sleep. But she fought the one as she fought the other, knowing that if she paused for the merest moment, for as long only as it would take her to tuck the hair up out of her eyes, not only her own work but everybody else's would suffer—and the whole big bright beautiful thing they were all helping to put together, the wonderful lighted

world upstairs whose existence depended on even the least of them, like herself, would come crashing down around them like a house afire. And it occurred to her once to wonder how they could possibly mean so much to those laughing beautiful seated people who knew next to nothing about them, whom some of them saw at best infrequently, for a single evening, and others—like herself and Cook—would never see at all; and the fancy came to her that they were all of them downstairs like the roots of a great tree, giving life to the leaves and branches and fruits and blossoms that, lifted in their beauty high into that cleaner air and glowing candlelight, would seem to have no connection with what was so far below them, so grubby, so ugly and so dark. But she thrust this fancy from her as vehemently as she had resisted the temptation to think about Bournemouth, or to lie down on the floor and go to sleep—and chastened by the moment's peril began all the more vigorously rubbing her cloth against a greasy plate.

Yet little by little the wheel slowed down, the flames at her back receded; and just as some hours earlier she had known without being told or seeing any signs of it that the party was about to begin, so now she could sense in the very air around her its gradual slackening, the faint but certain promise of its end. The time came when, without knowing why, she permitted herself to comb back her hair, take a deep breath, mop her face with her grimy dish towel, and when, as she hurried out to the yard for fresh water, it occurred to her that she need not hurry quite so fast. The time came when, the dinner plates, platters, sauceboats, tureens and vegetable dishes having gone upstairs, she started on the pots and pans; and when John and Martin and the new man moved at a slower pace through the kitchen, although the fragile dessert china and even more fragile coffee service they now carried were many times lighter than the burdens that less than an hour ago had borne them down. And a little later, as she was drying the dessert plates, she saw the three men idling against the wall munching partridge legs the guests had left; and when Maud and Josie, their arms empty, sauntered into the room, John, forgetting the violent words that had so lately passed between them, caught Josie round the waist and tried to kiss her—while she, equally forgetful, squealed with delight as she pulled away. Presently the men and girls were seated once more round the big center table over plates of

the steaming joint and vegetables Cook had saved for them and glasses filled with wine the guests had left. But Cook, too exhausted to eat, sat in her rocker wiping her steaming face with a large red handkerchief that was surely no redder than it. While Elly was drying the silver Cook called her name, and Elly wondered what she had done or failed to do, what terrible thing the little woman was about to say or do to her—but it was only to tell her that if she wanted it she could have her share now of the joint. Once more Elly was aware of the big dark hole in her stomach that she had been too busy all this while to think about; and although the plate Cook handed her was by no means as full as any of those on the center table, and the potatoes were black on one side and the meat mostly black burned strings, she could hardly wait to say thank you as she fairly ran with it back to her table, where, undeterred by whoever might be waiting, she sat on the high stool tearing the food apart and stuffing it into her mouth with her red and blistered fingers in all the passion of her need.

It wasn't until she had finished eating that she realized how weary she was. She ached in every bone and vein. A fog of drowsiness rose, as it seemed, from the very soles of her feet to spread all through her, pressing softly against her gummy eyelids with its soft dark blur. She thought in a kind of rapture of the bed—small though it was and hard though she imagined it to be—that was to be hers in the room she was to share with Maud and Josie, which Mr. Babcock had shown her earlier that day. As in a dream, she saw Mr. Babcock come into the room and sit down at Cook's table over a heaped and steaming plate and a glass Cook filled with wine from his own special decanter; and she knew how late it was. Sliding off the stool, she went to the big center table round which the others were lolling back in their seats picking their teeth and laughing at John's efforts to kiss Josie or pinch her cheeks or pull her hair; and gathering their empty plates, she prepared to wash them after fetching a final kettle from the cooling stove. And although this was surely the lightest of all the tasks she had performed that day, she moved through it so heavily that it wasn't until after ten that she was done. And then she remembered that before she could go upstairs she would have to ask Cook's permission, as had been the rule in every house she had ever worked in; and in a terror so chilling it had the effect of waking her, she went to the table where Cook sat over a final cup of tea with

Mr. Babcock and asked if she might please go upstairs now that she had done all her work. But Cook, dipping into her cup a crust of bread that she nibbled with great sucking noises, took such a time about answering that Elly wondered if she had heard the faintly spoken question; and for a fearful moment it crossed her mind that Cook had no intention of answering her but was determined to keep her standing there like that all night. Finally, however, Mrs. Jennings said that if she had done all her work, she didn't know, she was sure, what there was to keep her; but as Elly was trudging thankfully with her candle up the stairs that led to the servants' quarters, she called her down again and asked her what she meant by forgetting the warming pan for Maud's and Josie's bed. "An' moind yer don't tyke none of it fer yerself!" she shrieked, as Elly, the candlestick in one hand and the long handle of the pan in the other, was on her way up the stairs again—the peal of laughter with which Cook climaxed her injunction frightening her more than anything the little woman had said or done earlier that day.

When she reached the top landing she wished she could have had the courage to defy that final order, for she had forgotten, in the cozy warmth of the kitchen, how cold this part of the house had been when Mr. Babcock had taken her over it; and now that night had fallen it seemed twice as cold. Her teeth were chattering as she let herself into the small room with its gabled ceiling that she shared with the other two. As she slid their warming pan between the sheets of their big bed with its heavy eiderdown quilt and thick wool blankets she could scarcely bear to think of getting into her own so much smaller one which, as she could see very well in the moonlight falling across it, was thinly blanketed and quilted not at all. Blowing out her candle—there being so much moonlight in her part of the room that she had no need of it—she began, shaking in every limb as she was, to undress; but suddenly as she became aware of all that brightness streaming over the bed to lie beneath it on the bare and rugged floor like a glass carpet, a feeling of delight came over her, and forgetting the cold, she ran to the window and kneeling on the floor that was only an inch or two below it flung it wide open the better to peer out at the bright moon in all its dark depth of sky.

The sky was indeed very dark, with no stars in it; but the moon was brighter than Elly could remember ever having seen it, its halo of light the only area of brightness in the surrounding sky. Moonlight on the rooftops and chimneypots of the houses across the street gave them a strange look, like things she had never seen before; she might, she thought, have been in a foreign city instead of this London she had lived and worked in (except for that time in Bourne-mouth) all her life. And the street below, as she gazed down into it, looked different too, although, the moonlight not having got to it, it was as dark as the sky, and like the sky lit up in one corner where a gas lamp like a little moon made a blur of radiance. Suddenly she saw the tiny figure of a man, dressed in a hat and coat, and carrying a walking stick, moving along it. And for some reason this tiny creature—who was he? where was he going? from where, in all that darkness, had he come?—seemed to her quite as wonderful as the moon and the sky and the rooftops above him, to belong quite as much within that frame of window as anything else it contained.

“Yer blarsted scum!” Two hands gripped her shoulders, lifting her up and swinging her round until she was staring into Maud’s face in which the mouth was a thin line and the eyes two slits of rage. “Wotcher mean leavin’ the winder wide open loike this? D’yer want Josie an’ me to catch ar deaths?” She shook Elly until her teeth were chattering as they had chattered with the cold a while ago, with every shake shouting “Daft! Daft!” as if she were keeping time. “Daft—that’s what yer be,” she concluded, her arms dropping to her sides and her breath coming thick and fast from her exertion. “Yer should’ve ’eerd wot Cook an’ Mr. Babcock was s’yin’ about yer arter yer went hupstairs. Tell un wot they said, Josie gel.”

Josie, who as soon as they came in had gone straight to the window, closed it with a loud bang before answering. “Cook was arxin’ ’im wot asylum you coom outer,” she said, in her thick North Country voice. “An’ Mr. Babcock said ‘e thoct ’twas Bedlam by the look o’ yer.”

But since, of a different nature from Maud, she was one who could see the joke of almost anything, and being moreover in a happy glow from John’s

pinchings and tweakings and attempts to kiss her, she could scarcely go on for the giggles that came over her, and when she had finished, she collapsed on her side of the bed in a fit of laughter that she tried vainly to stifle by stuffing part of her pillowcase in her mouth.

For Maud, however, there was nothing to laugh at, and all the time she and Josie were undressing she kept up her bitter harangue. "'E'll 'ave a good deal more ter s'y nor that, Mr. Babcock will,'" she promised, "arter I get through s'yin' wot I got ter s'y ter 'im. I wouldn't be in your shoes, Miss Bedlam, fer anythink."

But for Elly, forcing her legs down between the icy sheets as she drew a pair of thin blankets across her shoulders, this threat held no terrors. It made no difference to her now what Maud might say to Mr. Babcock, or whether or not it resulted in her getting the sack. Had the other girl but known it, she had done something far worse to her than any amount of tale-carrying could do. She had come between her and her happiness, between her and the moon. She had spoiled that picture—so completely that Elly never wanted to see it again. It would have been no different, Elly thought, if she had robbed her of a leg or an arm or some other precious part of her body, for it seemed to her that for the rest of her life she would suffer from, be haunted by, that ruination and that loss.

But in a little while, after the other two girls had begun snoring and she was able to fancy herself once more alone, some of the happiness she had known kneeling before the open window came back to her—different from what had been, perhaps; less new and bright and startling, and for these reasons less wonderful. Yet it seemed to her that in the form it had taken she might be able to keep it always, in spite of anything Maud or Cook or anybody else might do—to think about, to remember, as she washed dishes or peeled potatoes or plied her broom or got the help's tea or fetched water or mended clothes or scrubbed woodwork or made beds or polished silver, in all the long work-filled hours of all the long work-filled years to come. But she knew that in order to have it with her always there was something she must do first, and in the bright intelligence of that moment she knew exactly what this was. She must tell somebody else about it; it was only by sharing it that she could make it her own. And it

didn't matter whom she told—one of these cruel, wicked girls since there was nobody nearer: the important thing was to tell it as quickly as she was able, for even now she could feel it beginning to fade. . . .

Getting out of her bed she went over to the big one and, since Maud's side was next to her, shook the girl gently but persistently by the shoulder to wake her up. She didn't care what Maud said or did to her, whether she struck her or called her names or told Mr. Babcock—neither did it matter to her that having worked every bit as hard as she had, Maud was every bit as weary as she was, and every bit as much in need of the sleep that would help her through the long day ahead. And yet it seemed to her that she loved Maud at that moment better than she had ever loved anybody or anything in all her life before.

Maud sat up, blinking and looking round her with a dazed expression that changed to one of fury when she saw Elly's face above her. "Wotcher want, yer trollop?" she demanded.

"Just ter tell yer-somethink," Elly said, her heart beating—not in fear but with a strange happy excitement. "Afore yer come in, when I was lookin' hout the windy, I seed the moon shinin' broight as could be in the skoy. An' the skoy was dark, but the rooftops acrost the street was all broight an' shinin' in the moonloight, an' when I looked down inter the dark, dark street, I seed a man walkin'."

"Did you wyke me hup just ter tell me that, yer simpleton?" Maud said, but it seemed to Elly there was more fear in her voice than anger; and in another moment she dove as if for protection beneath the bedclothes, with a final whispered plea to Elly to go back to her own bed and shut her mouth.

"Never seed nothink so beautiful," Elly went on happily, drawing the blankets once more across her shoulders; and with a smile of utter satisfaction for her matchless, her deathless lyric, she disposed her limbs on the hard mattress and fell asleep.

NEW YEAR'S INVENTORY

— BARBARA HARR

I have no lover
but eight pet cats

and one mad friend

and one who thinks (ha ho)
I am his wife

THE STOCKING IS BLUE BUT . . .

— JANE MAYHALL

That men may live, women must give up and give.
Note the eloquent symphony conductor;
some good little woman was always ssh-ushing in the corner,
keeping the world quiet for a tune.
Now, that old golden swan whom the papers renown
lifts up his mighty wings. Hear culture zoom.

Great teacher, great doctor, behind him's the proctor,
collector of the strength to carry on.

It takes two to make one, especially in a profession.

Who has time to succeed, all on his own?

Famous leader, gay star, who lights us to the future,
what bleak little mote was it that spurred you on?

Behind every career, there's a dear little dear
who shut up and let true genius out.
Not that it's unexpected, the system makes it clear.
Who wants to be the first poor fish, forsaking water?
The atmosphere's against it, bedraggled Pioneer.
Evolution is for boys, and not their mothers.

This should end, a funny poem; painters framing wives,
writers dedicating women to their books.
But to be fair, the score's a blur, who's or what's at fault,
a three-dimensional game of checkered blather.
The debate is sexual, that's why it won't work out.
Who'd give up her love life for a fight?

BUT WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY

— MYRNA LAMB

Time: whenever.

Place: a space, silent, encapsulated. A man lies with his head angled up and center stage, feet obliquely toward audience. His couching, which is by all means psychiatric in flavor, should also be astronautic and should incline him acutely so that he almost looks as though he is about to be launched. An almost perpendicular slantboard comes to mind or a simple sliding pond or seesaw.

There is a simple table or desk, angled away from man, and a chair placed toward desk that will keep the occupant's back toward man in orthodox (approximate) psychiatric practice, but will give profile or three-quarter view to audience.

At rise man in business suit is situated as delineated. Woman in simple smock (suggestive of surgical smock) comes on up-stage and crosses without looking at man. He does not see her. She sits silently. Some time elapses. A soldier, in green beret outfit, complete with M-1 rifle, comes to stage center. He faces audience.

MAN: Where am I? What have you done to me? Where am I? What have you done to me? Where am I? What have you done to me?

(SOLDIER stands at attention.)

WOMAN (her voice dehumanized by amplification): Don't worry. Don't worry. We have not done that to you.

MAN: That? What do you mean, "that"?

WOMAN: We have not taken anything.

MAN: Oh. (Pause.) But where am I? What have you done to me?

WOMAN: Are you in pain?

MAN: Yes. I think I am in pain.

WOMAN: Don't you know?

MAN: I haven't been able to consider it fully. The whole procedure. . . strange room—anesthetic—nurses? Sisters in some order?

WOMAN: Nurses. Sisters. In some order. Yes, that would cover it. Yes, anesthetic.

MAN: Anesthetic.

WOMAN: Yes. We didn't want you thrashing about. Or suffering psychic stress. Yet.

(SOLDIER executes left turn and salute.)

MAN: I am suffering abominable psychic stress now.

(SOLDIER stands at attention through next speeches.)

WOMAN: Yes, I know. But the physical procedure is at an end. You are in remarkably good health. Arteries. Heart. Intestinal tone. Very good. Good lungs too. Very good. I suppose that's due to the electronically conditioned air and the frequent sojourns to unspoiled garden spots of nature.

MAN: What has that to do with it? Was I too healthy? Was that it? Did some secret-society deity decide I should be given a handicap to even up the race?

WOMAN: Well, that is an interesting conjecture.

MAN: It can't be! That I was considered too healthy? That's preposterous.

WOMAN: Yes, it is. You couldn't really have been too healthy.

MAN: Then. . .what have you done? Was there a handicap?

(Left turn and salute by SOLDIER.)

WOMAN: To even up the race. I believe that was your phrase. I approve. Very compressed. Very dense. The race that we run. . .the race of man, as we shorthandedly express it. . .and somewhere in my memory, a line about the race going to the swift. . .yes, and then the association with handicap. . .a sporting chance for the less swift.

MAN: Handicap. . .some kind of tumor. . .some kind of cancer. . .

(Young woman hereafter referred to as GIRL crawls onstage.)

Is that it? What have you done to me?

WOMAN: No, no. Calm yourself. No cancer. No tumor. Not parasitic death, my friend. Parasitic life.

MAN: I don't understand you. What have you done to me? Parasitic life? (Pause.) Parasitic life. Pseudoscientific claptrap. Parasitic life. Witchdoctor mumbo-jumbo. Parasitic life. Wait a moment. There is a meaning to that phrase. It can't apply to me—not to me—not—

(GIRL pulls on SOLDIER'S leg. She is still in crawling position. SOLDIER stands at rigid attention throughout next speeches with no obvious awareness of GIRL. She rises and approaches him, reaching out to him.)

WOMAN: Yes, it can apply to you. We have given you an impregnated uterus. Implanted. Abdominal cavity. Yours. Connections to major blood vessels were brought in very quickly. As a matter of fact, it was destined for you. It has achieved its destiny.

MAN: I don't believe it. I can't believe this nightmare.

WOMAN: Well, that is how many people feel upon learning these things. Of course, most of those people have been considered female. That made a difference, supposedly. We've managed to attach a bit of ovary to the uterus. I don't think it will do any real good, but I will give you a course of hormonal and glandular products to maintain the pregnancy.

MAN: Maintain the pregnancy, indeed! How dare you make that statement to me!

(Using outreaching arm of GIRL and foot leverage, SOLDIER flips her over and throws her to floor.)

WOMAN: I dare. There is a human life involved, after all.

MAN: There is a human life involved? You insane creatures, I'm fully aware that there is a human life involved. My human life. My human life that you have decided to play with for your own despicable purposes, whatever they are.

WOMAN: Do you think you are in the proper frame of mind to judge? My purposes?

(SOLDIER does pushups with sexual-soldier connotations over outstretched body of GIRL.)

Your ultimate acceptance of what you now so vociferously reject? The relative importance of your mature and realized life and the incipient potential of the life you carry within you? Your life is certainly involved. But perhaps your life is subsidiary to the life of this barely begun creature which you would seek to deny representation.

MAN: Why should I give this. . .this thing representation?

(SOLDIER rises and kicks GIRL aside. Walks to rifle. Walks around GIRL, pacing, right shoulder arms.)

It is nothing to me. I am not responsible for it or where it is nor do I wish to be. I have a life, an important life. I have work, important work, work, I might add, that has more than incidental benefit to the entire population of this world—and this—this mushroom which you have visited upon me—in your madness—has no rights, no life, no importance to anyone, certainly not to the world. It has nothing. It has no existence. A little group of cells. A tumor. A parasite. This has been foisted upon me and then I am told that I owe it primary rights to life, that my rights are subsidiary! That is insanity! I do not want this thing in my body. It does not belong there. I want it removed. Immediately. Safely.

WOMAN: Yes, I understand how you feel. But how would it be if every pregnancy brought about in error or ignorance or through some evil or malicious or even well-meaning design were terminated because of the reluctance or the repugnance of the host? Surely the population of the world would be so effectively decimated as to render wholly redundant the mechanisms of lebensraum, of national politics, of hunger as a weapon, of greed as a motive, of war itself as a method.

(SOLDIER lunges and stabs at the invisible enemy, accompanying movements with the appropriate battle grunts and cries. There is hatred and despair in the sounds.)

Surely if all the unwilling human beings who found motherhood forced upon them through poverty or chance or misstep were to be given the right to choose their lives above all else, the outpouring of acceptance and joy upon the wanted progeny of desired and deliberate pregnancies would eliminate forever those qualities of aggression and deprivation that are so necessary to the progress of society.

After all, you must realize there are so many women who find themselves pregnant and unmarried, pregnant and unprepared, with work that cannot bear interruption, with no desire to memorialize a casual sexual episode with issue. So many human beings whose incidental fertility victimizes them superfluously in incidents of rape and incestuous attack.

(Following the lunges, stabs, and grunts, SOLDIER slams the rifle against the stage in vertical butt strokes.)

So many creatures confounded by sexual desire or a compelling need for warmth and attention who find themselves penniless, ill, pitifully young and pregnant too.

(Finally SOLDIER simply stands, lifts rifle to shoulder.)

And so many women who with the approval of society, church and medicine have already produced more children than they can afford economically, psychically, physically. Surely you can see the overwhelming nature of the problem posed by the individual's desire to prevail as articulated by you at this moment. If one plea is valid, then they might all be. So you must learn to accept society's interest in the preservation of the fetus, within you, within all in your condition.

MAN: Do you know that I want to kill you? That is all I feel. The desire to kill you.

(SOLDIER points rifle at GIRL'S head.)

WOMAN: A common reaction. The impregnated often feel the desire to visit violence upon the impregnator. Or the maintainers of the pregnancy.

MAN: You are talking about women.

(SOLDIER spreads GIRL'S legs with butt of rifle. Nudges her body with rifle.)

Pregnancy, motherhood is natural to a woman. It is her portion in life. It is beneficial to her. It is the basic creative drive that man seeks to emulate with all his art and music and literature. It is natural for a woman to create life. It is not natural for me.

(SOLDIER kicks and rolls GIRL'S body in sharp rhythm corresponding with beginning of WOMAN'S sentences in next speech so that GIRL, in 3 movements, is turned from her back to her stomach to her back again. SOLDIER then turns away. Freezes.)

WOMAN: The dogma of beneficial motherhood has been handed down by men. If a woman spews out children, she will be sufficiently exhausted by the process never to attempt art, music, literature or politics. If she knows that that is all that is expected of her, if she feels that the fertility, impregnation, birth cycle validates her credentials as a female human being, she will be driven to this misuse of nature as a standard of her worth, as a measure of the comparative worthlessness of those who breed less successfully. That will occupy her sufficiently to keep her from competing successfully with male human beings on any other human basis.

MAN: You cannot dismiss natural as an inappropriate term. My body cannot naturally accommodate a developing fetus. My body cannot naturally expel it at the proper moment.

WOMAN: Females cannot always naturally expel the infant at term.

(SOLDIER turns, rests butt of rifle on GIRL'S stomach, and presses. GIRL pants.)

The pelvic span is a variable. Very often, the blood or milk of a natural mother is pure venom to her child. Nature is not necessarily natural or beneficial. We know that. We alter many of its processes in order to proceed with the exigencies of our civilizations. Many newly pregnant women recognize that the situation of egress is insufficient in their cases. In your case, there is a gross insufficiency. The Caesarian procedure is indicated.

MAN: But that is dangerous, terribly dangerous even to contemplate. I tell you I am terrified almost to the point of death.

WOMAN: Others have experienced the same sense of terror. Their kidneys are weak, or they have a rheumatic heart, or there is diabetes in the family. As I have told you, you are quite healthy. And you will have excellent care. You will share with others a lowered resistance to infection. But you will not go into labor and you will not risk a freak occurrence in which strong labor produces a suction through the large blood vessels that bring particles of placental detritus and hair and ultimate suffocation to the laboring woman's lungs. . . .

MAN: Your comparisons are obscene. My body isn't suitable for carrying a child. There isn't room.

(SOLDIER slams rifle between GIRL'S legs. Hard.)

WOMAN: Many female bodies are as unsuitable for childbearing as yours is.

(SOLDIER stands at attention again.)

Modern science has interceded with remedies. Your internal circumstance will be crowded. Not abnormal. Your intestines will be pushed to one side. Your ureters will be squeezed out of shape. Not abnormal. Your kidneys and bladder will be hard pressed. All within the realm of normality. Your skin will stretch, probably scar in some areas. Still not abnormal.

MAN: But I am a man.

WOMAN: Yes, to a degree. That is a trifle abnormal. But not insurmountable.

MAN: But why should anyone want to surmount the fact of my being a man? Do you hate all men? Or just me? And why me?

(SOLDIER executes present arms maneuver.)

WOMAN: At one time I hated all men.

MAN: I thought so.

WOMAN: I also hated you most particularly. I am not ashamed of it. (She turns toward him.) You may guess the reason.

MAN: I recognize you, of course.

(SOLDIER comes violently to attention and slams rifle against stage, vertical butt.)

WOMAN: And you understand a little more.

MAN: But that was so long ago. So—so trivial in the light of our lives—your life—mine—so trivial! Surely your career, your honors, the esteem in which you are held. . .surely all of this has long since eclipsed that—that mere episode. Surely you didn't spend all those years—training—research—dedication—to learn how to do this. . .to me!

(SOLDIER adopts caricature of at ease position.)

WOMAN: Surely? No, I cannot apply that word to any element of my life. Trauma is insidious. My motives were not always accessible to me. That mere episode. First. Then certain choices. Yes. Certain directions. Then, witnessing the suffering of others which reinforced memories of suffering. Then your further iniquities, educated, mature, authoritative iniquities in your role of lawmaker that reinforced my identification of you as the. . . enemy. All those years to learn how to do this. . .to you.

MAN: You really intend to go through with this, then?

WOMAN (silence. . .looks at him. . .even through him)

MAN: What will become of me? I'll have to disappear. They'll think I've died. Absconded. My work. Believe me, lives, nations, hang in the balance. The fate of the world may be affected by my disappearance at this moment. I am not stating the case too strongly!

(SOLDIER squats, staring out at audience.)

WOMAN: I recognize that. However, those arguments are not held valid—here.

MAN: Why not? They are valid arguments anywhere. Here or anywhere.

WOMAN: I think you are rather confused.

MAN: Wouldn't you be under these circumstances? (Realizes.)

(During speech that follows SOLDIER and GIRL circle counter-directionally in blind panic, looking to see where the danger is coming from as SOLDIER aims rifle fruitlessly in several directions.)

WOMAN: Yes. Would be and was. So were many others. Couldn't approach friends or relatives. Seemed to run around in circles. Time running out. Tried things. Shots. Rubber tubes. Tricky. Caustic agents. Quinine. Wire coat hanger. Patent medicine. Cheap abortionist. Through false and real alarms, through the successful routines and the dismal failures, our minds

resided in one—swollen—pelvic—organ. Our work suffered. Our futures hung from a gallows. Guilt and humiliation and ridicule and shame assailed us. Our bodies. Our individual unique familiar bodies, suddenly invaded by strange unwelcome parasites, and we were denied the right to rid our own bodies of these invaders by a society dominated by righteous male chauvinists of both sexes who identified with the little clumps of cells and gave them precedence over the former owners of the host bodies.

(GIRL drops to ground, her face hidden in her arms. SOLDIER simply stands.)

MAN: Yes. I understand. I never thought of it in that way before. Naturally. . .

WOMAN: Naturally. And yet, you were my partner in crime, you had sex with me and I had sex with you when we were both students. . . .

MAN: Did you consider it a crime?

WOMAN: Not at the time. Did you?

MAN: I never did.

WOMAN: When did the act between two consenting adults become a crime—in your mind?

MAN: I tell you—never.

WOMAN: Not your crime?

MAN: Not anyone's crime. . . .

WOMAN: So you committed no crime. You did not merit nor did you receive punishment.

MAN: Of course not.

WOMAN: Of course not. You continued with your studies, law, wasn't it?

(SOLDIER pushes GIRL all the way down with rifle. He gets up and kisses rifle.)

You maintained your averages, your contacts. You pleased your family, pursued your life plan. You prospered. Through all of this, you undoubtedly had the opportunity to commit many more non-crimes of an interestingly varied nature, did you not?

MAN: Non-crimes? Your terminology defeats me. Yes. Yes to all of your con-

tentions. I led a normal life, with some problems and many satisfactions. I have been a committed man, as you know, and have done some good in the world. . . .

(SOLDIER kisses own arms.)

WOMAN: Yes. I know. Well, the non-crime that you and I shared had different results for me. Do you remember?

MAN: I do remember. . . now. But I wasn't in a position then. . . I wasn't sure. I recognize my error, my thoughtless now. . . but I was very young, I had so much at stake. . . .

WOMAN: And I? Everything stopped for me. My share of the non-crime had become quite criminal in the eyes of the world.

(There is a shot offstage. SOLDIER cries out. He is wounded in the belly. He falls. The GIRL falls and cries out simultaneously.)

Wherever I went for help, I found people who condemned me and felt that my punishment was justified, or people who were sympathetic and quite helpless. I had no money, no resources. My parents were the last persons on earth I could turn to, after you. I dropped out of sight; for a while I hid like an animal. I finally went to a public institution recommended by a touch-me-not charity. I suffered a labor complicated by an insufficient pelvic span and a lack of dilation. I spent three days in company with other women who were carried in and out of the labor room screaming curses and for their mothers.

(SOLDIER and GIRL are lying head to head on their backs. They are wounded and they cry out inarticulately for help as the amplified voice overpowers their cries. Their downstage arms reach up and their hands clasp.)

My body was jostled, invaded, exposed as a crooning old man halfheartedly swept the filthy floor. Many of my fellow unfortunates would come fresh from their battles to witness the spectacle of my greater misfortune. Three days and that cursed burden could not be released from the prison of my body nor I from it.

(The GIRL screams. She begins to pant loudly as though she can not catch her breath. The SOLDIER moans.)

Finally there was a last-ditch high forceps, a great tearing mess, and the emergence of a creature that I fully expected to see turned purple with my own terrible hatred, and ripped to shreds by the trial of its birth. What I saw, instead, was a human being, suddenly bearing very little relationship to me except our common helplessness, our common trial. I saw it was a female, and I wept for it. I wept and retched until my tired fundus gave way and there was a magnificent hemorrhage that pinned me to that narrow bed with pain I shall never forget, with pain that caused me to concentrate only on the next breath which seemed a great distance from the one before. Some kind fellow-sufferer and my own youth saved me. I awoke to tubes spouting blood from insecure joins. The splattered white coats of the attendants made it a butcher shop to remember. I never held that baby.

(The arms drop. They lie still to end of speech.)

For some days I was too ill. And then the institution policy decreed it unwise. There was a family waiting to claim that female creature, a family that could bestow respectability and security and approval and love. I emerged from that place a very resolved and disciplined machine. As you know. I worked. I studied. I clawed. I schemed. I made my way to the top of my profession and I never allowed a human being to touch me in intimacy again.

MAN: It was—it was criminal of me to have been the author of so much suffering. . .

(SOLDIER sits up.)

to have been so irresponsible. . .but I was stupidly young. I never could have imagined such things. Believe me.

WOMAN: Yes, you say you were young. Stupidly young. But what was your excuse when you were no longer young and stupid?

MAN: I'm sorry. I'm tired. I don't understand you.

WOMAN: Your daughter and mine grew to womanhood. And she and all her sisters were not spared the possibility of my experience and those of my generation. -

(GIRL sits up. GIRL and SOLDIER face each other. SOLDIER stands and becomes speechmaker, rifle arm behind his back, other hand "sincerely" across his heart.)

Because there you were. Again. This time, not perpetrating unwilling moth-

erhood upon a single individual, but condemning countless human females to the horrors of being unwilling hosts to parasitic life. You, for pure expediency, making capital of the rolling sounds of immorality and promiscuity which you promised accession upon relaxation of the abortion laws. Wholesale slaughter, you said, do you remember? Wholesale slaughter of innocent creatures who had no protection but the law from the untimely eviction from their mother's sinning wombs.

(GIRL crouches at his feet, in attitude of supplication. She rests her head on his boot-tops and lies still.)

You murdered. You destroyed the lives of young women who fell prey to illegal abortion or suicide or unattended birth. You killed the careers and useful productivity of others. You killed the spirit, the full realization of all potential of many women who were forced to live on in half-life. You killed their ability to produce children in ideal circumstances. You killed love and self-respect and the proud knowledge that one is the master of one's fate, one's physical body being the corporeal representation of it. You killed. And you were so damned self-righteous about it.

MAN: I cannot defend myself.

(GIRL crawls off to stage right.)

WOMAN: I know.

MAN: But, I beg you, is there no appeal from this sentence?

(SOLDIER cradles rifle.)

WOMAN: As it happens, there is. We have a board before whom these cases are heard. Your case is being heard at this moment, and their decision will be the final one. The board is composed of many women, all of whom have suffered in some way from the laws which you so ardently supported. There is a mother who lost her daughter to quack abortionists. There is a woman who was forced to undergo sexual intercourse on the examining table by the aborting physician. There is a woman who unwittingly took a fetus-deforming drug administered by her physician for routine nausea, and a woman who caught German measles from her young niece at a crucial point in her pregnancy, both of whom were denied the right to abortion, but granted the privilege of rearing hopelessly defective children. There is an older woman who spent a good part of her child-rearing years in a mental institution when she was forced to bear a late and unwanted child. There are others. You won't have to long to wait, now. For the verdict.

MAN: I promise you, that if I am spared, that I will be able to do much to undo the harm I have ignorantly done. This experience has taught me in a way that no other learning process could. I am in a position to . . . For the first time I can truly. . . identify. . . it would be to the advantage of all. . . .

(SOLDIER leaves rifle and stands as a human being, without pose.)

WOMAN: That is being taken into account.

(Someone brings report or WOMAN goes to side of stage where she emerges with it from a cubicle.)

MAN: Is that the decision?

WOMAN: Yes. The board has decided that out of compassion for the potential child—

MAN: No, they can't!

(SOLDIER turns to audience.)

WOMAN: Out of compassion for the potential child, and regarding the qualities of personality and not sex that make you a potentially unfit mother, that the pregnancy is to be terminated.

(BLACKOUT)

SONG

— RUTH HERSCHBERGER

*I said, I fear and resent men.
He said, I'm not a man, I'm a flower.*

Sergei's a flower —

What a flower!

A broncho of a bloom.

Carnation, rose?

A soft primrose?

Chrysanthemum, or whom?

Sergei's a bower —

What a bower!

A grapevine of delight.

Sergei's a pose,

A yellow rose,

A stallion in the night.

MORALIZING OVERHEARD IN A FOREST

— JEAN GARRIGUE

Your duty is to cling
I heard an old oak say
To its well known and much
Advertised ivy.

I'd have you insinuate
Your charms into every part —
Naturally I mean of me —

My rugged old bark
And clamber up my trunk
Succinctly to my top.
You have feelers. You must feel,

You have tendrils, cover me.
As I am erect and firm
You must from base to crown
Confirm my grand consistency.

Do not flutter. Simply hang
On to me by every knack
Nature's given you. Art
Is not needed, save

The supple art to do
What Nature, if not I, first taught you.
Nor will you, like the honeysuckle,
Strangle me, I know,

By winding round so tight
I am nearly sapped
Of my liberty to do
With my boughs what I want.

Nor are you venomous
Like that three-leafed thing
That creeps and crawls along the ground
To get its vicious root up

My unresisting slope.
You are healthy, you are not,
Though you cherish me,
Of a gluttonous appetite

Nor am I simply host, my dear,
To a parasite.
You give beauty, I support.
O darling, how you decorate

My barbarous pole with your crisp coat.
Now assist me in this thought:
That though you cannot bend me
(I am stout)

You're half my gamboling prisoner
I liberate by standing pat.
Is not this a lively pact
And a symbiotic act?

Alas poor lovers who would imitate
The perfect pitch we've reached.
The one may try but is too agile,
The other is not staid nor bold enough.

Too great a consciousness untethers
Root of vine and oak.
The one trails off
The other casts his boughs about in desuetude

Who'd get together must lament
Singly and apart love as a bad joke.

MR. AND MRS. WIRE

— JANE MAYHALL

Kitchen. Fat lady, MRS. WIRE, at the table, eating.

MRS. WIRE: I am the wife of a great French painter. Gobble-gobble. I am eating my heart out. He is painting daffodils. Gobble. I have to hurry as I have a date with—I can't tell you. Before he comes back, there is something—I can't tell you. Don't worry, he knows about it. But I don't dare say a word. Um. Slurp. Glub. How famous my husband is. That historic perspective. If only. If only I can keep him from—(She gives a big wipe to her chin, and stands up, dazed.) Oh my God! Isn't life wonderful! Look at those roses shining on the window sill. They fill my heart with lust—for what? The most delicate, merest flavor of unobtainable—ha! that word from me!—beauty. (She stands for a moment, misty-eyed—then shakes herself.) Well, my dears, here I come.

(She picks up a broom and starts to sweep. The sound is heard of a slammed door outside, and footsteps coming up the stairs. MRS. WIRE stops in terror.)

MRS. WIRE: What? Not yet. (She runs to look at the clock.) But I haven't had that climax. (Wild, broken-hearted.) Oh, housework, my hateful lover, now I must desert you. (Swiftly she hides the broom behind the ice box.)

(Enter MR. WIRE. He is slim and distinguished-looking, and wears a beret. He stands at the door, his eyes roving about in suspicious anguish.)

MR. WIRE: What were you doing?

MRS. WIRE: Nothing. Eating grapes.

MR. WIRE (sniffing): I smell (he looks at her accusingly) floor polish.

MRS. WIRE: No.

MR. WIRE: Ammonia mixed with soapsuds.

MRS. WIRE: No

MR. WIRE: Copper gloss, and vinegar.

MRS. WIRE: No, no. . . .

MR. WIRE: But something more—difficult to discern. (He walks about like a detective; suddenly his eyes light on the broom behind the ice box.) You were sweeping the floor!

MRS. WIRE (clutching her bosom): Oh, God!—no.

MR. WIRE (all at once noble and severe): I'm sorry. What can I say? Why—(he sits down, then looks at his wife with an expression of tender exhaustion) why do you lie to me?

MRS. WIRE: I don't want to.

MR. WIRE: Just when I . . . (He stares sadly out of the window.) I was going to paint. Now.

MRS. WIRE: I was going to—

MR. WIRE (dully): What were you going to?

MRS. WIRE: Nothing.

MR. WIRE: What?

MRS. WIRE: Joke.

MR. WIRE (exasperated): What?

MRS. WIRE: I was mumbling into my—

MR. WIRE (jumps up, shouting): WHAT?

MRS. WIRE (hangs her head): Gobble-gobble.

MR. WIRE: Oh. (He seems to understand these words.) That's different. (Cheerfully.) Have you had lunch?

MRS. WIRE: Many.

MR. WIRE: Let's have lunch.

MRS. WIRE: I said I— All right.

MR. WIRE: Wine, then cheese. And luminescent pearly apples. Dense beautiful bowls (he is circling the table) like the skin of girls. And what voluptuous pewter and silver. Oh darling! You are my still life.

MRS. WIRE (distinctly): Morte Nature.

MR. WIRE: What? Oh, now you are speaking French. Our native language. But I suspect irony.

(She has been pouring the wine and sits down. Lifts her glass, as if for a toast.)

MRS. WIRE: Never.

MR. WIRE (sipping): Tell me. Whom, or rather what thoughts were you entertaining when I came in?

MRS. WIRE (clamming up): Nothing. Not a one. Not a drop. Not a molecule. Not an atom. Not a speck of— (She claps her hand over her mouth.)

MR. WIRE (profound melancholy): Dust. I know.

MRS. WIRE (almost affronted): I didn't say it. What are you working on?

MR. WIRE (pulling himself together): Ah—a portrait of a woman.

MRS. WIRE: What kind?

MR. WIRE: A woman like—a cantaloupe.

MRS. WIRE: Glug.

MR. WIRE: Juicy.

MRS. WIRE: Glug-glug.

MR. WIRE: Philosophical.

MRS. WIRE: No recourse possible—

MR. WIRE: What?

MRS. WIRE: Ummm.

MR. WIRE: Fruit, vegetable, mineral. An atmosphere of the amenable. (Speaks to her seriously.) Why can't it be true?

MRS. WIRE: It is. I swear! Only today I was looking out the window. And I thought— (revelation) I haven't a thought!

MR. WIRE (petulant): You mustn't tease.

MRS. WIRE (dreamily): And then I said—if I had a thought (she smiles brilliantly) it would be weightless!

MR. WIRE: Like?

MRS. WIRE (thinking fast): An astronaut.

MR. WIRE (carried away): An astronaut on a diet.

MRS. WIRE: Yes!

MR. WIRE: Or, like the strains of a vitamin content. (She starts to speak, but he lifts his hand.) No, let me do the thinking. (A serious look comes again into his eyes. He enters a mood of slight speech-making.) Now, my darling, listen. Why teach women such boring occupations as law, medicine, science and journalism, which men excel in, when women are so fitted for a task which men can never dream of attempting, and that is— (he closes his eyes) to make life bearable. I say, God bless—

MRS. WIRE (reverent): My fallen arches.

MR. WIRE: What did you say?

MRS. WIRE (briskly): I said, why don't you take a nap?

MR. WIRE: A nap. Yes. (He stretches.) That reminds me. You make me feel terribly married. When I'm with you, I feel (he thinks) either sleepy or sick.

MRS. WIRE (laughs for the first time): The trouble with sarcasm is, you never know which of us meant it first. Now, about that nap—

MR. WIRE: I'm thinking of changing my mind.

MRS. WIRE: I was trying to suggest something you'd like.

MR. WIRE: I don't know—

MRS. WIRE: Please.

MR. WIRE (yawns): Well—

MRS. WIRE (gets on her knees): Believe me.

MR. WIRE (comforted, and even amused): Yes, I do. I believe you. (He glances sleepily around the room.) If I take a tiny nap, what will you do?

MRS. WIRE: I— (she gets up) I— (Her tone is false and dissembling.) Nothing.

MR. WIRE: Nothing! (All at once totally awake.) Nothing, like hell. God damn it, I know. God damn it, you're going to clean the god-damn house!

MRS. WIRE: No, I promise. (But she is obviously thrown out of kilter, upset by her husband's perception.)

MR. WIRE (standing straight. He appears to be inspired with what he now has to say): Do you know what I want?

MRS. WIRE (backing against the wall, truly afraid of the threat of profundities): N-no. What?

MR. WIRE: I want— (thundering) I want a clean house, and without anybody doing the cleaning.

MRS. WIRE: Yes. (She crosses herself.) Miracles.

MR. WIRE: Yes. (He takes a pair of glasses out of his pocket, wipes them carefully and puts them back in his pocket. She watches respectfully.) There are miracles. You just don't believe in them. You have no faith. Now (he yawns, significantly) I think I can sleep.

MRS. WIRE (little girl voice): I want you to. (Almost without sound.) I—want— (dying fall to final word) you—to. . . .

MR. WIRE (touched, looks at her soulfully): My pigeon. My little fat pigeon.

MRS. WIRE (lowers her head, then lifts it to speak): Bow-wow.

MR. WIRE (pleased again by this kind of remark, glances about the kitchen with a peremptory practicality): But—we haven't had lunch.

MRS. WIRE: Oh! (She leaps up.) Here's a slice of liverwurst. (She cuts off a piece from portion on the table.)

MR. WIRE: Pate de foie. (He glances at it quietly.) Strange—the resemblance. It looks like—

MRS. WIRE (near tears): Oh, don't say it. You're too good to me. (She turns away, weeping with gratitude.)

MR. WIRE (pats her): But really, my darling, it does look like you.

MRS. WIRE: Oh— (shyly) I'm not that beautiful.

MR. WIRE: Wait, I'll show you.

(He goes to the corner of the room and brings out a beautiful painting of a voluptuous young girl, clearly MRS. WIRE—the face is the same—from twenty years ago.)

MR. WIRE: There it is. I painted it. Yourself. Twenty years ago.

MRS. WIRE: Ha-ha. Liverwurst. (She falls over backwards.)

MR. WIRE (alarmed): What is happening? Don't leave me. I need you. (She seems to be crawling toward the door.) Wait. You don't understand. You are my only inspiration. If you go away—who will— (He stops.)

MRS. WIRE (significantly): Bow-wow.

MR. WIRE (overwhelmed at the realization): Who will clean my house?

(They link arms and do a soft-shoe shuffle offstage.)

APHRA-ISMS

To counter the prevailing male viewpoint with the proper hysterical perspective.

"Remember Beckett's 'Happy Days'? The husband can barely turn around himself. How can he help his wife out of the engulfing sand?"

"She can't help herself, but she helps him."

"Women are different. We're programmed that way. Still we don't want to become like them. We don't want to lose what humanity we have."

Overheard on a bus

Equality must not mean leveling down.

All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women should be collectively rebellious to the power of men. They are so far in a position different from all other subject classes, that their masters require something more from them than actual service. All men, except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely but a favourite. They have therefore put everything in practice to enslave their minds. . . . The masters of women wanted more than simple obedience, and they turned the whole force of education to effect their purpose. . . . All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of

women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. And by their affections are meant the only ones they are allowed to have — those to the men with whom they are connected, or to the children who constitute an additional and indefeasible tie between them and a man. When we put together three things — first, the natural attraction between the opposite sexes; secondly the wife's entire dependence on the husband. . . and lastly that the principal object of human pursuit, consideration and all objects of social ambition, can in general be sought and obtained only through him, it would be a miracle if the object of being attractive to men had not become the polar star of feminine education and formation of character.

John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," 1869

There is no sex equality until women participate on an equal basis with men in politics, occupation, and the family. Law and administrative regulations must permit such participation but women must want to participate and be able to participate. In politics and the occupational world to be able to participate depends primarily on whether home responsibilities can be managed simultaneously with work or political commitments.

Alice Rossi, "Equality Between the Sexes, An Immodest Proposal," 1964

I have often wondered how man did get the upper hand over woman. Even given that she was busy bearing and nurturing the children. No, it was more than that. She was done in by her own compassion. Man was both son and husband; how could she resist loving him? He often made it difficult enough for her, and there have been women who rejected the system, but for the most part she managed to keep on being both mate and mother.

An androgynous conception of sex role means that. . .tenderness and expressiveness should be cultivated in boys and socially approved in men. . .that achievement need, workmanship, and constructive aggression should be cultivated in girls and approved in women. . .changing the social definitions of approved characteristics for both sexes.

Alice Rossi, "Equality Between the Sexes, An Immodest Proposal," 1964

Natasha kept on talking, with a tenderness and sympathy of which only women are capable.

Maxim Gorki, "One Autumn Evening," 1894

Even the English language is against us. "Be a mensch," he said. "I can't," she answered. "I'm a womensch."

Woman will always be dependent until she holds a purse of her own. I would therefore have every girl of sixteen begin this day some profitable business. . .

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eighty Years or More, 1898

The median income in 1967 for all workers fourteen years and over was: white male workers, \$6,833; nonwhite male, \$4,369; white female, \$3,254; and non-white female, \$2,228.

U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports, Series p-60#60, June 30, 1969

I took to working for women's suffrage. . . . In 1907 I even stood for Parliament at a by-election on behalf of votes for women. It must be quite impossible for younger people to imagine the bitterness of the opposition to women's equality. The savagery of the males who were threatened with loss of supremacy was intelligible. But the determination of large numbers of women to prolong the contempt of the female sex was odd. I cannot recall any violent agitation of Negroes or Russian serfs against emancipation. The most prominent opponent of political rights for women was Queen Victoria.

Bertrand Russell, Autobiography, published 1967 but written about 1940

I'm tired of tiptoeing around the male ego.

Ann Beck, conversation, 1969

Your mothers are not just garbage.

Overheard at a Women's Liberation Conference, 1968

At one time a woman could at least look forward to becoming a sainted mother in her old age, as compensation for earlier sufferings. Now it's open season on mothers.

You may go over the world, and you will find that every form of religion which has breathed upon this earth has degraded woman. There is not one which has not made her subject to man. . . . What power is it that makes the Hindoo woman burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband? Her religion. . . .

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Speech, 1885

Love, usually spelled s—e—x, has replaced religion as the opiate of the masses.

When Alan approaches what can he do? Being honest as the day and logical as the sun, there is only one thing he can do. And that he does, to do him justice, over and over (I said, turning the pages) and over again. And that, I added, aware of the awful nature of the confession, seems somehow dull. Shakespeare's indecency uproots a thousand other things in one's mind, and is far from being dull. But Shakespeare does it for pleasure; Mr. A., as the nurses say, does it in protest. He is protesting against the equality of the other sex by asserting his own superiority. . . virility has now become self-conscious — men, that is to say, are now writing only with the male side of their brains.

Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own,
1929

The angry erection is probably the greatest social disease in the world.

The man over there says women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over puddles, or gives me the best place — and ain't I a woman? Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me — and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man — when I could get it — and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have born thirteen children, and seen most of 'em sold into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me — and ain't I a woman?

Sojourner Truth, Speech, 1851

Joe DiMaggio once explained that ball players lie about their age because it makes them more valuable in the market. "Joe," my wife told him, "now you know what it's like to be a woman."

Leonard Lyons, newspaper column,
1969

The extent and depth of the male's hatred and hostility toward his subject colony of women is a source of continual astonishment. Just as behind the glowing mirage of "darkies crooning in the twilight" is the reality of the block, the whip, and the manacle, the history of women is full of colorful artifact: the bound feet of old China's women deliberately deformed that they might be the better controlled (you can work with those useless feet, but you cannot run away), the veil of Islam (or an attenuated existence as a human soul condemned to wear a cloth sack over her head all the days of her half-life), the lash, the rod, the rope, domestic imprisonment through most the world's history, rape, concubinage, prostitution. We have our own impressive catalogue of open tyrannies. Women are still sold in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. In Switzerland they are even today disenfranchised. And in nearly every rod of ground on this earth they live only via the barter system of sex in return for food and security — and often very little of the latter. . . .the fear of force is there before every woman always as a deterrent: dismissal, divorce, violence — personal, sexual, or economic.

Kate Millett, Speech, 1968

The woman who would be human must cleave a course between monsterdom and martyrdom.

Mimi Agneau, conversation, 1969

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MY WIFE

— ELIZABETH FISHER

I've been married for fifteen years. She was very young when I met her, my wife, not much over nineteen, I almost ten years older, had had many experiences with women, including an aborted marriage. When they brought her to my house, I didn't want to let them in. It was during the War, and I worked on the early shift in a war plant. When my doorbell rang about ten thirty one weekday evening, I was already in bed, since I would have to be up at five in order to get from the West Side of lower Manhattan out to Kearny, New Jersey, by 7 a.m. I dragged myself to the door with only a short raincoat buttoned over me.

There were two couples outside, the men Village acquaintances, the kind you talk to in bars and who then become your intimate friends as long as you're entertaining. The girls I didn't know. Herman the Vermin was what we called the man I knew best, a sometime ice-skating instructor, a fur worker in lean days, but above all a Village character with more pretensions than anything else, one of those whose soul was located in the tip of his tongue and who would talk for hours on end in the cafeteria on Eighth Street.

When I first came to New York from Texas and was trying to write, people like Herman used to fascinate me. I don't talk easily and they seemed to be so all-knowing, so clever and well informed. A few years of being taken

in by them, having them camp in my house, touch me for meals and money as the price of their company, which I later discovered to be all wind and no substance, had made me rather shy of Herman and his ilk.

"We've come to hear your records of the Bach Suite in B Minor," he said. "Do you mind playing them for us?" I was still groggy with sleep, feeling nasty besides. As Herman the Vermin tried to convince me to let them come in, I looked behind him to the two girls. The one who was standing farthest away had a tender face, vulnerable and dewy. It seemed to me that I had seen the girl closest to Herman before, but I had never seen the very young one. There was an incongruity about her freshness next to the other three, Herman's faded masculinity, the burly seaman who stood behind him, and the tired ordinariness of the older girl. Because of something about the girl, a look of appeal struggling with embarrassment, I let them come in and I put the records on the player. It was something I had rigged up myself; in those days before the word hi-fi had been invented, I was involved with building my own radio equipment. I had gotten a ham operator's radio license and had begun to learn more about audio, both from my work as a radio inspector for the Signal Corps and from studying on my own.

The girl, who was introduced to me as Susan Rothstein, was looking over my tiny apartment. She knelt down to look at the books in the bookcase, then spotted the records. "Oh, you have Josh White!"

"Yes," I said, surprised. "Do you like him?"

"Oh, yes!"

"We'll put them on after this is over."

Herman looked at us angrily for talking while the sacred Bach was being played. When it was over, and I put the Josh White records on, he could hardly contain himself. "There is a house in New Orleans," came Josh's plaintive tones.

"You're not going to play that crap after Bach!"

"But they're lovely," said Susan happily. "Don't spoil it."

"I can't help it," Herman said. "I can't listen to it now; it desecrates my impressions. I'll tell you what. Let's go over to the Earle Hotel and have a drink. Won't you come with us?" he said to me.

"I'll have to get dressed," I said, thinking I'd be asleep on the job as usual

the next day. "Why don't you wait here and finish listening to the album, Susan, then I'll take you over and we'll meet the others."

"Fine," Susan said, nor was there any objection from the other three. They thanked me for the music and apologized for disturbing me.

I went into the bedroom, a small adjunct behind glass doors, and pulled my clothes on behind the closet door. When I came out the others were gone; only Susan sat in my one shabby armchair. I wanted to kiss the soft dreamy look there, but I was afraid I might startle her and lose her before I had started. "Which one of them were you with?" I asked her.

"I wasn't with any of them. I just bumped into the three of them in Washington Square and joined them for dinner. Then Herman suggested we come here and listen to your records."

"Do you really want to go and meet them now? Or would you rather stay and listen to records? I have a bottle of white wine in the icebox; let's just stay here."

Later that night I asked her whether she was a virgin. A silly question, I suppose—she couldn't say no and she couldn't say yes. But she might as well have been; she was unawakened. It was instantaneous between us. The automatic record changer turned itself off, and I carried her from the couch into the bedroom. Afterward I took my guitar down from the wall and strummed bits of various melodies, Bach, flamenco, blues, one thing blended into another. That week she moved in with me; a month later we were married.

Those days, those months together were the best time of my life. I was the first man to give her an orgasm, and the experimentation and discovery opened new worlds for both of us. I discovered, too, because she had an abandon and a freedom hidden within her which were what I had always dreamed of in a woman. There was a joy in the moment and the act, in the physical side of lovemaking, an unself-conscious rapture. We couldn't keep our hands off each other when we walked in the street. We had to stop and kiss every few steps. At parties she would nestle into me. We couldn't wait to get home so we could make love again. She became suffused with beauty, her lips soft and beestung, swollen from kisses; her breasts grew fuller; she radiated. And as for me, while I had always felt myself well endowed where potency was concerned, I surprised even myself at my

capacity, both in quantity and quality. I developed extraordinary endurance at waiting for her. Although there, too, we experimented, and we found that if we prolonged the act too much, there was a point of diminishing returns, the pleasure became a torture into which strain and tension entered, and the joy was less intense, a relief exacerbated by previous irritation. So we found our medium. And over and over again, several times in one night, though in the long run twice was right, once at night and once in the morning. Sometimes for sheer piggishness we'd go on, rest a few hours, and wake and start again.

"Make me hard," I'd say, and she would touch me patiently, repeating her caresses, up the inside of my thigh, skirting the area which began to quiver for her touch, gliding up my side, around my shoulder, across the neck, stopping long at the nape, and then firmly, down the backbone, buttock, the back of one leg until she came down as far as she could reach, to start the movement all over again. Or else she would drive me mad, with a delicate butterfly touch, skimming over my flesh so I could barely restrain myself from crying out. Or I would kiss her, experimenting with each area of her body, sucking on her neck, her breasts, her belly, until I reached that most delicious nectar of all.

I had been the first man to give her orgasms, and it was I who led her down the road of enjoyment and freedom. When I met her she had been ashamed of her body. It was not a stylish body for the time, but voluptuous, lush. I would bury myself in it as though I were sinking into the soft texture and smoothness of her skin, her pear-shaped outpointing breasts, big thighs and buttocks and hips. She was like something out of the Arabian nights, an Oriental body, small-waisted and billowing, a body built for lovemaking and enjoyment. The first place I had lived in New York was on Saint Mark's Place on the East Side. I used to walk west past New York University to the Village, and I remember how the girl students pleased me; there was a European lushness about them after the Protestant meagerness of East Texas that had been my background—their plumpness, full features, suggested hearty eating, sensuality, all the promise and richness of immigrant New York. Susan brought me the realization of that promise.

There were days of nakedness. "Do you like this?" she would say, experimenting with a particularly impetuous pressure.

"No, too much," and I would tell her where to touch me and how and which was better, to touch me just near the end of my penis, gently, not so hard

that it hurt, but not so delicately that the irritation outweighed the pleasure, the agony turned frenzy.

"But you're not circumcised," she had said. "So much the better," I answered. "There's that much more for play."

"I'm not sure I know what circumcised men are like," she said. "Whatever I might have known before I met you seems to have disappeared; it's as if there had never been anything before but the present.

I discovered her, too, the touch on her clitoris that made her scream, the motion outside, on the mons veneris, that made her tense and quivering, and if continued too long sent her off into uncontrollable spasms which ruined her enjoyment, the firmness that guided her along a surer road of excitement and satisfaction.

We dove, we swam, we drowned in each other's flesh--and came alive again to be renewed. Sometimes I would tell her how to caress me; at others she would guide my hand, my mouth, my organ. Each abandoned himself to the other. First I would be active, she more or less passive; then, exhausted, I would lie back and she would take the initiative. When after much indulgence my spirit was willing but my flesh was weak, she was tireless about caressing me to reawaken my body. "Too much, too much," sometimes I cried. We explored every variation, tried every position we had heard or read about, used fingers, lips, tongues, to test and taste and titillate each nook and cranny of the body, sought different intensities, different gradations of tenderness and passion. Sometimes I'd take her with her clothes on; I liked that rough excitement; other times there would be a glow and gentle exploration, tenuous and prolonged almost to the point of pain--perhaps that was what she liked more, too much.

That summer we would come home from work to make love, have dinner, perhaps walk through the dark streets of the Village, over to Horatio Street and then to Gansevoort Wharf where one could catch a few cool breezes off the river. As we walked we embraced or kissed; I remember one night a rat running across our path, startling us out of our hug, before he disappeared again along a gutter that skirted the dark shadow of a warehouse. And back home again we hurried to get to bed together.

Sometimes I would reach out for her, half asleep, and she would respond, even out of deep sleep. Then we would wake again early in the morning to make

love before going off to our respective jobs. She liked it best then, after the intimacy of the night had brought us close. Weekends were spent above all in the little apartment, with brief interludes for necessary chores, a late breakfast, shopping for food so she could cook dinner, or else a meal in a restaurant.

And always we talked freely, realizing that lovemaking is an art which mingles sense and sensibility, body and emotion, from such mundane detail as an empty bladder, an unencumbered colon to the feeling of warmth and love, appreciation and compliment. Because I knew she had been unhappy about her body, and because I loved it so much, I used to tell her how much I reveled in her flesh, that she looked like a Renoir or a Rubens, with her translucent pink skin, the lusty thighs and hips, the contradictory small waist and wide-pointing breasts.

And she would touch my chest, my shoulders, my muscles. "But you have such strength."

"I know. I worked on them."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, when I was thirteen or fourteen, I sent away for physical culture magazines. I used to practice with dumbbells and weights." And I was glad for the shoulders and chest which gave her such pleasure, though I had long since ceased to care as I had in that first adolescent self-consciousness: now again I was grateful for that puerile vanity when I had felt like a weakling and had spent hours exercising, trying to develop my masculine powers.

Later on, toward morning, I would worry about the scratching of my beard, grown overnight. "Oh, no, it's delicious pain," she assured me, though when I saw her in the morning, her face all scraped and red, I was sorry I had not gotten out of bed to shave again.

So we talked and tried; "Do you like it? Is it too much?" as we found our way through the delicious pleasure-pain torturing of prolongation and extremes, the gradual discoveries of what pleased the other most. There would be favorites — a period when she discovered my ears and how kissing, mouthing, biting them would send me into ecstasies, then a switch to another part, or I would focus on her neck, her back, the kissing of her eyes, her nipples, until another period, another place took precedence.

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Withal there was the freedom not only of words but of sound, the shivers and moans and exclamations with which we expressed our pleasure, the sweat and passion, and the final achievement of orgasm together with build-up and control on my part, then the ultimate fugue of crescendo and abandon which precedes the final moment.

"What does it feel like?" she asked me afterward.

"As though I'm penetrating, thrusting deeper and deeper, going into the only and ever home that is. And for you?"

"As though I'm drinking at a blessed source, receiving fullness and completion, becoming whole."

We discussed the contradictory notions of possession. She said she felt she possessed me because I was inside her; I countered that she became all mine because I had entered and assumed her. Finally we decided there was no point in competing; it was the possessing each other, neither more possessed than possessing.

"You can't counter who has more joy or make a distinction between the joy you feel which adds to the joy I receive." I said slowly, fumbling for it, "knowing I give you joy in immeasurable though geometric proportion."

"No, it's too much," she said. "You're making it mathematical and logical when it's all poetry."

"The poetry of mathematics isn't so bad."

But she refused to follow me here. "No, I have no feeling for abstraction," she said. "I feel it here," indicating the space between her legs, "and then all the way up to the top of me. If my body becomes spirit, it's through feeling, not mathematics—I don't want to know any more."

But I did, and so while I said no more to her I continued with my progression, wondering about an equation—joy received, multiplied to the n th factor by joy given, becomes the augmented product of joy toto, an orgiastic quantum theory for our own fourth dimension. But you have to subtract all the worldly qualities: given the amount of fatigue, the lack of sleep, the hunger, the having to interrupt to pee or to put in a diaphragm—to which add the imponderables of emotion . . . my love more or less than yours . . . I dozed off, lost in the ridiculous impossibility of further solution.

We used to try to stay together as long as possible afterward, I pressing on her but resting on my arms too, then relaxing completely; sometimes I would doze off and would awake startled, "Did I hurt you? Aren't I too heavy?"

"No, it's a delicious oppression."

Finally either one or the other would move regretfully, unable to resist longer because of an itch, a muscular ache, or "I'm sorry, I can't breathe," she would say regretfully, and we would draw apart gradually, to find ourselves bathed in a mixture of sweat, sperm, and female juices.

Then there was the joking, the relaxed intimacy after passion, the two naked bodies together, so shortly before one but still linked by the oneness of our experience. We would lie there exhausted, sides touching, each holding the other for greeting and reassurance. "Hold him," I would say. "You never can tell what may happen during the night. Just for safekeeping."

We would get up and take a shower together, washing each other's body, I possessive about her, reaching out to my domain, the breasts whose form I was coming to know so well, by feel as well as sight, the blessed triangle of her sex, she greeting me familiarly with a soft undemanding touch on mine.

It was, I think, the most glorious time of my life, the only time I have ever known that degree of happiness. She was my joy, my pleasure, my beloved. The world became mine, people were wonderful, and nothing existed but the thought of her body and the hours we had spent and would again spend together. It was our poetry, our bread, our banquet, No one else existed; no one had ever loved before; we were infinitely alone in the infinite communion of our meeting. We developed our own language of endearment, and because we were young and wanted something exclusively ours, we turned to a language of opposites: fuck-face was one. Where others called me Chris, she always called me Christopher; in fact, in later years I would know she was angry at me when she used the diminutive form of my name instead of the formal that was exclusively hers.

It must have been a couple of weeks after we met that we decided to get married. I had asked her to move in with me on the second night we were together. She worked in a publishing house on lower Fifth Avenue, not far from my apartment. Unhesitatingly she assented to my request. Her clothes were partly at the house of a friend who lived two blocks away, partly at her mother's house on West End Avenue. Over the weekend she brought them down.

"What did your mother say?" I asked.

"I told her I was moving back with Joanna. Ever since she discovered a diaphragm in my desk drawer, she doesn't dare to ask me any questions."

"Did she ask you about it then?"

"No, she didn't have the courage to. She asked my sister. Do you know what that idiot said?" Susan looked at me and laughed. "She said, 'Oh, I'm sure she doesn't use it.' Isn't that wild? I guess she was taken off balance, but really she could have had the sense to keep her mouth shut and say she knew nothing about it."

I had been surprised at finding her so well prepared. After the first night and my irritated exclamations over using a condom, she had said she would bring down her diaphragm. The truth was that her friend Joanna had taken her to a doctor to get it; it had been part of their feminine rebellion, she told me, why shouldn't women have as much right to enjoy sex securely as men? Not that she had the courage that went with her bold statements; there was much fear and timidity in her along with the theoretical freedom. It was true when her sister said that she had not used the diaphragm; she had had only casual encounters, I believe, I didn't like to hear her talk about her tiny past. I hated to think of her with men who were out to take her, unappreciating and crass, with their meaningless vulgarities.

We had gone to Staten Island that Saturday about two weeks after we met. We used to stay in the house making love until hunger drove us out. At the Eighth Street Griddle, where we always had breakfast on weekends, we decided to take a ferry to Staten Island. From the ferry terminal we took a train to South Beach and walked along the boardwalk, eating ice cream, looking at people. It was early in June, and there were few people on the beach, more walking on the midway and at the beach stands.

"It's nice, isn't it?" There was a provincial rattiness, without the blatancy of Coney Island, that seemed terribly touching to us. Afterward we walked through the interior of the island to Clove Lake Park, where we thought about taking a rowboat, decided we were too tired.

It was while we were standing waiting for the bus on Liberty Boulevard, linked arm in arm, pleasantly tired and hardly saying a word, that I suddenly suggested marriage. She was such a miracle to me, her readiness, her smile, her

obvious joy in me, I felt I had to grab her and keep her before it all disappeared. Nothing I said was wrong, nothing I did seemed to displease her. Oh, I know, it was the beginning, but it did seem as if the whole world had suddenly transformed itself; the doctrine of human imperfectibility was seriously threatened.

The harmony continued; she received my suggestion as if it were the most natural thing in the world. I don't even remember what words were used—only that she was all joy and agreement.

"I don't think I can get married in New York," I told her. "You know I got a New York State divorce a couple of years ago. You're not allowed to remarry for three years. She wanted the divorce so she could get married again." I had told Susan about my first wife, a rawboned girl from the University of Texas, in fact, the original reason why I had come to New York. We had been separated for several years, but she had not needed the divorce until her new man was drafted and they decided to marry.

Susan and I arranged to take a few days off from our jobs and go to Maryland where there was a waiting period of three days but no physical examination.

She borrowed a ring from Joanna, and we packed my old suitcase with an extra shirt for me, a summer dress for her. It was an old white dress, "for class day in college," she explained.

It was hot in Baltimore when we arrived, steaming hot. We were too late that day to do much after looking around midtown Baltimore and finding a hotel for the night; the next morning I went over to the City Hall to apply for a license. "Look," I said. "It says, 'previous state, single, widowed, divorced.' What shall I put down? Maybe if I say divorced it will make difficulty. They may ask for documents or hold us up."

"I don't think they can do anything to you. Put down divorced."

"No, I don't want to take any chances." And I crossed out the other two, leaving single.

Something we had not bargained for, though—the marriage ceremony had to be performed by a clergyman. Again we consulted. "What shall we do?" Since I was an ex-Baptist—at least, I had gotten the call one summer when I was visiting my grandmother's farm in East Texas and had been dunked in the river along with my two sisters, had practiced intensely for at least a year before backsliding, until at fifteen I knew I was an atheist—she a non-practicing Jew, we decided

that we wanted something as inoffensive as possible. Neither of us knew much about it but Unitarianism seemed to both of us to be the least religious religion we could think of. I looked up clergymen in the classified section of the telephone book, located a Unitarian minister, and made an appointment for a Monday, not three but four days hence.

Meanwhile we wondered where to go to spend our pre-honeymoon. We went shopping downtown for a dress for Susan; we had not realized that Sunday would prolong our stay. Back at our hotel, dripping wet after the humid heat of a Baltimore June, we listened to the chambermaid's suggestion that we might like to take a ferry across Chesapeake Bay.

"Is there any place to stay there?" I asked.

"Why don't you take the ferry to Love Point?" she suggested. "There used to be a boardinghouse there; I think there still is."

Afterward Susan and I joked about Love Point. It was so banally appropriate, but we decided to take it for ourselves anyway. "Love Point it is!"

The cool breezes on the open bay were a delicious relief after the heat radiated by Baltimore's wrought iron and stone. The two hours passed quickly enough. Arm in arm we explored the two decks of the ample dowager of a boat, then sat down beside the rail to drink beer. It felt as though we had come to a different country, the ease of manner of the deck hands, the courtliness with which the old Negro behind the refreshment counter suggested we try Baltimore crab cakes and Maryland beer.

We had been assured when we bought our tickets that there was a boardinghouse at Love Point. When the ferry docked at a tiny harbor made by the point, with not a house in sight save the shed which served as a boathouse, we were directed up the road a piece. Sure enough, there it was, a rambling farmhouse set in the midst of farmland; nobody came there but a few fishing enthusiasts. The beach itself, across the fields on the other side of the point, was a narrow strip of sand below golden cliffs, with only farms and pasture bordering it. During the three days we were there the only living creatures within sight were a few cows silhouetted on the cliff's edge above us, a red Irish setter who came bounding down to join us one day, and the birds hovering high overhead.

Those three days were even more of a revel of the senses than New York had been. I remember the golden-oak ceiling of the boardinghouse bedroom

with its thin walls and creaking bed: we could not be too free there because we could hear the noises and breathing of the man in the room behind us, sounds and steps passing in the corridor.

On the beach we stripped off our clothes to swim in the nude: we hugged and embraced there in the sunlight with only water and sand and rock for our companions. The water was shallow a long way out, sun-warmed and embracing; it was perhaps that which gave me the idea of making love in the water. We tried it, she with her legs wrapped around me, but there was too much friction to make it enjoyable, the water washed away all her lovely female juices.

Everything we did those three days was of the senses and everything was marvelous—the level fields, the open beach with its pale sand and flat outstretch of water, the living in tune with the simplest of needs. The boardinghouse was run by an old Southern lady who told us of why it was called Love Point: an Indian princess had leaped to her death there when abandoned by her English explorer lover.

For me there was much of the South in which I had grown up and much that was new. The tiny succulent fried chicken which was served at every meal, breakfast included, in addition to another main dish, reminded me of the way food was cooked at home, of what I was always expecting and never getting when I ordered chicken in New York. I found myself lecturing Susan on what was wrong with Northerners, but she only listened and laughed.

Of the trip back to Baltimore, in fact, of the wedding ceremony itself, I remember little. There was no mention of Christ and the Trinity, no mention of obedience, but we promised to cleave unto each other for ever and ever until death did us part. That was no problem: we had been cleaving unto each other with great zest that past month, nor did it seem possible to me that it would not continue with the same fervor we now felt. I was uncomfortable afterward about how much to give the minister: I gave him ten dollars though I had not much money left. "He deserved it," I told Susan when we were walking back along the suburban streets toward the bus that would take us to the railroad station.

We felt suddenly strange together; there was a flatness after the fait accompli. Our three days of halcyon sensuality were far away, and we were awkward and on the other side of the bay. Our clothes were rumpled and

dirty; Susan had wanted to change from the cotton seersucker we had bought to the fresh white dress packed in the suitcase but I begged her not to; I had been wearing the same pair of pants all week end and had nothing to change into, I wanted her to keep me company. I became conscious now of how dirty and sloppy I was. The wordless communication now worked in the opposite direction; Susan stumbled and almost fell a couple of times; neither of us spoke during the ride back to the station. We sat in the bar of the waiting room; a train for New York was due in less than an hour.

"Shouldn't we have something to celebrate?" Susan said.

"Why, yes, maybe a glass of wine." Wine had been our drink; mellow and hazing, without being strong enough to obliterate, wine was for lovemaking.

In later years we both switched to stronger drinks, wine only made us feel loose and sloppy; we needed whiskey to sharpen and intensify. But that was much later; during those first months we needed little liquor, a glass of wine, a glass of beer, it was the idea more than the actual effect of the alcohol; we were both inebriated on each other's flesh and the joy of finding each other.

So this time the wine helped us. I felt drained and empty, but relaxed too, and Susan said nothing, she only leaned against me with a timid pressure. We got on the train and jogged to New York, falling asleep and waking again, until we hit a strangely unchanged city in the late spring twilight. We went to see Joanna that evening, to return the ring and to recount some of our adventures. Joanna was a tall blond girl who made me feel uncomfortable. As Susan's closest friend, she had influenced her, I felt, in all their talk of female freedoms and rights. I agreed in principle but it was boring to listen to, and I often felt that it was I who was being attacked, not the abstractions of history, society, the past. Later we bought rings for both of us in one of the silversmith stores in the Village, matching twists of silver wire, because Susan said she did not like gold.

Although there had been a temporary letdown right after the marriage ceremony, the plateau of joy was resumed on our return to my little apartment. Susan used to run home at lunchtime from her office to shop and prepare fancy meals for our dinner. She worked so hard, cooked such ambitious dishes which she was later too tired to eat, that I think she lost just about the same ten pounds I gained that summer. It was a part of her discovery of the senses, this

exploration of the foods of different countries, pork cooked with wine and cumin seeds, Armenian, French, Italian dishes.

"My parents were trying so hard to be American," she told me. "They wanted everything to be as Anglo-Saxon as possible, they thought European cooking was low class. We had the most boring foods — grilled meats, vegetables cooked without butter. . . ."

She loved to cook; it was one of her ways of heaping love on me, though after a while I begged for respite, something a little simpler — I was beginning to feel logy and uncomfortable from all that rich food and wine. She would get up at five in the morning to make breakfast for me before I went off to work, though I begged her not to, knowing she had to wait two hours before she went to her own job.

I took up my guitar again; I had not been practicing much in the years before I met Susan, though at one time I had been good enough to earn money by giving lessons. I played my guitar; I worked on improving the record player and radio. We were domestic and not domestic; mostly we lived a life shut off from others, steeped in ourselves, our bodies and our senses. Gradually the other world began to impinge on us; I introduced Susan to some of my friends, other rebels who had come up from Texas during and before the War. That summer of 1944 there were some, like my brother-in-law Jake, who were beginning to straggle back to the United States from the services.

She brought me up to meet her long-suffering parents on West End Avenue. They were strange people but good-hearted. It must have been a shock to them to have a Texas Baptist introduced as a son-in-law, but they were polite, even accepting. I felt shy with them as I do with most people; Susan, however, chattered to bridge the gaps. Sometimes it would annoy me, her ready smiles and easy way with people, though I knew that inside she, too, was shy, only where I don't talk with people she talks twice as much to put herself at ease.

When I first came to the Village I had wanted to be a writer. I gave it up after four years of struggle; it contributed to the ruin of my first marriage, and finally I made up my mind, tore up my collection of rejection slips, and, the War permitting, got myself a job in the defense factory. A nonfunctional

palpitation of the heart kept me out of the Army, and I had not the least regret about being 4-F, nor any envy for the reluctant heroes among my friends who were sent overseas.

Our marriage was to me what my miserable efforts at writing had never succeeded in being. It was my expression in life; I felt I had a meaning and a satisfaction. Our love had been my art. Oh, yes, the years passed; we have two children now. I went from working in the defense plant to writing technical manuals. With the help of my radio studies I have passed myself off as an engineer of sorts, and with my technical knowledge and writing ability, such as it is, I earn a good living for us now writing technical copy.

Sometimes I feel I grow old, I wear my overcoat buttoned, there is a bald spot on the back of my head. The children brought the first upset in our intense physical rapport. When Susan was pregnant I thought I would never be able to stand it, seeing her swollen and ugly, her features blotched and heavy, everything changed. Afterward she was preoccupied with the baby; no more was there that liberty, no longer could we spend our weekends making love, the spontaneity had gone, everything had to be planned. But I had job troubles at the time, and they were dependent on me, my wife and my little baby girl.

With worries about money and being always occupied with the mechanics of living, there was so little time to feel the loss. I took up photography, bought a second-hand camera, a big unwieldy Graflex that took magnificent pictures. I experimented with lights and exposures, took pictures of the baby at home and in the park. I did my own developing and brought baby pictures into the office like so many others.

We've settled into a routine; the drudgery of the children takes up much of her time. Though we have occasional recrudescences, for the most part the poetry has become prose. We know each other so well, our sex life has settled down into the tested ways of marriage. I stimulate her with my hand until she is ready for me, then enter; it is humdrum and yet warm and close, no surprises, pleasant or unpleasant. Still there is an occasional night of freedom when the children are at her mother's house, when we have been to a party, had a few drinks, and a fitful flare brings us a faint echo of that early bliss, an intensity beyond the usual. She becomes more alive and active as she was in the early

days; I take the time or energy to court her a little — I know what she likes most, it's just that I'm usually so tired and so impatient, so numbed by the daily preoccupations.

What's worst is the tedium. I have my hobbies — the guitar, photography, building radios; there are the two children, both girls, with the constant demands on her time and mine. Sometimes the women in the house gang up on me, though Jean, the older, is usually closest to me. More quiet than her sister Renee, she comes for walks with me, a hangover from the days when I used to take her out on the weekend to give her mother a rest, and she is a passionate reader, more inward turned than her sister. We can sit comfortably together for hours without talking, while Renee is like her mother, always chattering and demanding active attention.

My job doesn't take much out of me now, though I had troubles at first. I had had several jobs before I finally found this one with a small conservative agency. Afraid I couldn't hold it, I used to grind for hours to turn out a piece of copy written in clear English but still technically accurate. But I am more confident now, my boss likes me, and we have had the same steady clients for years. Susan and I had early housing problems; it had been bad enough with the first child in a room-and-a-half apartment. When she was pregnant the second time we moved to Levittown on Long Island, and our unhappy exile there has made us grateful for the rambling apartment on Manhattan's decaying West Side where we've been living these past years.

Yet when most discouraged with the dreariness of the usual married life, with family bickering and material considerations that obliterate aliveness, and turn life into existence, I remember the past and that I have known the pleasures of the flesh as few are privileged to know them. I think of our joy together, of what I could and did do for Susan, of how I made her a woman and gave her fruition and expression, and I'm heartened a little. How many of the people I know, friends and co-workers, can say they have had a real love, a whole love, a true and reciprocated emotion. It's a rare thing, and even if today I am beaten and squashed by the mold I have had this. And I console myself with little joys, little moments, a fortunate touch in the morning, a moment's excitement at night, evanescent reminders of the intensity of that past together; and for an instant I feel less dead inside.

But the other day at the tail end of a cocktail party she started to talk. We had had several couples from my office as well as her sister, tactless as ever, and some of my old friends from Texas, people I rarely see these days. Two couples stayed on and on, one, a new man at the office whom I barely know and his drawn and rather unattractive girl, the other, Bob and Jill Tepper, among the earliest friends we'd made through my work. It was late; we had been nibbling on potato chips and unsatisfying bits and had drunk too much and eaten too late and too little, and I was feeling tired and let down. Susan had been talking to the new man's girl friend in a corner, and somehow the other three had drifted toward them, though still discussing among themselves. I came in from the kitchen with more ice and slices of bread and cheese, and in one of those gaping silences that toll a dying evening, her voice suddenly rang out, "No, it was never real," with a venom and bitterness I never knew she had. Oh, she would pop off occasionally, usually about something I'd done, a lack of consideration or affection for her, but when I pointed out to her that she had been tactless or inconsiderate herself, chosen a bad moment, she would come around to my way of thinking, often end up weeping and apologizing. We would come together with lovemaking, have an extra tenderness and sweetness after the fight. And we've built up sore points: she says I never have time and don't talk to her enough; I find her too demanding of attention, always interrupting when I'm busy building or studying; she complains that I stay out too late with Jean and my camera; we quarrel over my messiness or that I don't want to go to see her family or her friends. Joanna moved to the West Coast some time ago, fortunately; I never did like her or her influence on Susan. There are complaints that I spend too much on records and camera and radio equipment, that she doesn't have enough for clothes for herself and the children, or that she's tired of cleaning and dishwashing and laundry — the usual squabbles and arguments between married people, I imagine.

But now there was a woman I didn't recognize telling a stranger, "No, I've never had sexual happiness. I never had satisfaction. I used to fake orgasms, even in the beginning, and now for years and years I've been faking them completely."

She's overtired, drunk, let down, she doesn't mean it, I told myself. But it pounds in my head. How can it be? I rack my brain. Those groans, those

rhythmic moans, that gradual relaxation — all fake, none of it true? Then what was true? Anything? Or did she just say it to hurt me? She can be wild and exaggerated. But I wasn't in the room when she began, even though it peeled out for all to hear.

I pass it all over in my mind, her readiness always in the beginning, the not wanting to let me go, even the growing indifference today, and I can't decide. Yes, no, one day I think one thing, the next the opposite.

I look at the children. They're my daughters, but they're hers, too, and incipient women. Will they, too, grow up to betray me and their husbands, shatter a man's whole *raison d'être*? And had I not loved them, not only for themselves, but as they reminded me of her and of those times together?

It can't be, it wasn't true, I tell myself, and I study her, bland and plump and motherly, with the germs of that dewy tenderness hidden now in the formed face of a woman, yet making a fleeting appearance in a turn or a pose. I go over the photographs I've taken of her and the girls, looking to see if the camera caught something I never perceived. I've tried to live over the years, particularly that first period before it all became pale and humdrum, a marriage like so many others. And I don't know, but I fear, I fear. There's nothing left and nothing real. How can I live now, how can I go on?

CONTRIBUTORS

HELEN NEVILLE is a poet whose work has appeared in the *Nation*, *New Republic*, *Poetry*, *Accent*, *Commentary*, and others. She has a volume of poems ready for publication. This is her first published short story. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

BARBARA HARR's poetry has been in *Chicago Review*, *Harper's*, *Poetry Northwest*, and others. Her book, *The Mortgaged Wife*, will be published by Swallow Press next spring. She is an editor at New Directions.

JANE MAYHALL's first novel, *Cousin to Human*, was published in 1960. Her most recent book, issued in 1968, was *Givers and Takers*, a collection of satiric poems. She has published essays, short stories, and poetry in *Harper's Bazaar*, the *Nation*, *Perspective*, and many others, and is the author of a full-length play, "Narcissus."

MYRNA LAMB left acting for writing. "But What Have You Done for Me Lately" is part of a larger work, *Scyklon Z*. It was originally produced at the Martinique Theatre in the spring of 1969 by the New Feminist Theatre and, along with two other of Miss Lamb's plays, is in their working repertory in the current program at their Wooster Street Theatre. Miss Lamb has published in short-story anthologies and acted with the Actor's Mobile Theatre. She describes herself as a political activist.

RUTH HERSCHBERGER is the author of that classic of feminist literature, *Adam's Rib*. She is a poet whose work has appeared in literary magazines, newspapers, and anthologies. Her new book of poetry, *Nature and Love Poems*, is being published by Eakins Press this fall.

JEAN GARRIGUE, the poet, has published six volumes of poetry, the most recent of which is *New and Selected Poems* (Macmillan, 1968), and a novella, *Animal Hotel*, as well as criticism. She has won many prizes, and her work appears frequently in major magazines and anthologies.

ELIZABETH FISHER has written articles and criticism for *The New York Times*, *New York Post*, *Rome Daily American*, *Midstream*, and others. She is the author of a novel, *Three Seasons*, and a play, "Elijah Never Comes," and has translated fiction and drama from the Italian.

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JANE ARDEN SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR GWENDOLYN
BROOKS MARY ELLMANN MARYA MANNES
GRACE PALEY ANNE SEXTON MAY SWENSON